CATTY ATKINS
FINANCIER

Books by

CLARENCE BUDINGTON KELLAND

Mark Tidd

Mark Tidd in the Backwoods

Mark Tidd in Business

Mark Tidd's Citadel

Mark Tidd, Editor

Mark Tidd, Manufacturer

Catty Atkins

Catty Atkins, Riverman

Catty Atkins, Sailorman

Catty Atkins, Financier

HARPER & BROTHERS

Established 1817

IN THE HOLE WE PUT THE BOX, AND THEN WE SET BACK THE FIRST STONE

[See page 57]

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By

Clarence Budington Kelland

Author of "MARK TIDD," "MARK TIDD, SAILORMAN"
"MARK TIDD, RIVERMAN," ETC.

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CATTY ATKINS
FINANCIER

CATTY ATKINS—FINANCIER

CHAPTER ONE

"CATTY," says I, "it can't be done."

"What can't?" he said, and cocked his eyes at me with the kind of expression he gets in them when he is looking for an argument. Catty Atkins loves arguments the way a mouse loves cheese.

"Why," says I, "getting to be a millionaire."

"Folks have," he says.

"But not the way the paper says this fellow did."

"How was that?"

"It says he earned fifty dollars working on a farm, and then started out. And he made that fifty grow into a million."

"How long ago?" says Catty.

"When he was forty."

"Huh," says Catty, kind of disdainful. "Pretty slow, wasn't he. Must have taken him more than twenty years."

"I'd like to see *you* raise fifty dollars to a million in a *hundred* years," says I.

He looked me over a minute and then he says, "We've got fifty dollars."

"We have," says I, "and then some."

"Then let's make a million."

"Your tree is full of crows," says I.

"Wee-Wee Moore," says he, "'we can do it."

"We can peel sunburn off a garter snake," says I.

"Listen here. This sort of gets me excited. Let's try it anyhow."

"Everybody does," says I. "Show me a man that isn't trying to be a millionaire."

"Hardly anybody is," says he. "Most men are contented to run groceries, or drive trucks, or work in a bank, or dig ditches. They don't try for anything else. So long as they can make a pretty fair living, why, they're satisfied. They don't set out to be millionaires, so they never get to be millionaires."

"Huh," says I.

"It won't hurt to try," says he.

"I'll do anything once," says I, "but let's not advertise it. Folks would put us in a padded cell."

"All right. Secret it is. Wait a minute while I think it out." So I waited while he puckered up his eyes and kind of waved the end of his nose in the air, and thought. "I've

got it," says he. "We'll go in partnership. Our capital is fifty dollars. We'll see how big we can make it grow during this vacation. A start toward our million."

"Fine," says I. "Mowing lawns, I suppose."

"That," says he, "is labor. It isn't finance."

"Oh, this is going to be finance."

"With a capital F," says he. "The idea is to make our money earn more money. That's the rule of the game. We musn't earn money just by working. The only way we can use our fifty dollars is to use it, see?"

"I don't," says I.

"I hardly expected you to," says he.

"Go chase yourself," says I.

"Now listen," he says, "while I print out the directions. We're to use our fifty dollars to make money with. That means we can't just work at some job and add what we earn to the fifty. Any money we make, the fifty must have a share in. It must be money we couldn't make without using the fifty as capital. Understand now?"

"I kind of see a dim light," says I. "We can't earn a dollar driving the grocery wagon. That's labor. But we can buy a cow with our fifty and sell it for sixty—and that's finance."

"You plunked it right in the eye," says he.

"When do we start?" says I.

"Now," says he, and that was just like him. When he got it into his head to do a thing, he was always sorry he couldn't start it yesterday, but so long as he couldn't he wouldn't waste a second. It had to start right then. Wouldn't waste a minute.

"We'll go to the bank and draw fifty dollars out of our savings account," says he.

"You carry it," I says, "because if I did, we'd be fifty dollars farther away from our million than we are now."

"You'd lose your skin if it wasn't stuck on you," he says. "Come on."

Just as we were coming out of the bank I looked up and there was a kid about our age driving up in an automobile. It was a little one with just one seat, but it looked pretty slick.

"We'll have one of them when we get our million," says I.

"Who is he?" says Catty.

"Never saw him before," says I.

Then the kid stopped his car and leaned out and looked us up and down kind of unpleasant and when he'd got through he says, "Hey, you kids, where can I buy some gasoline in this cow pasture?"

"You don't buy it," says Catty, "you have to milk it from the cows."

"Don't get smart with me," says the kid.

"No, sir," says Catty, innocent-like. "Thank you, sir."

"I want some gas for my car," says the kid. "How can I get it?"

"One way is to have better manners," says Catty.

But I was interested. "Say," I says, "is that your car?"

Catty sent his elbow into my ribs, but I didn't care. I wanted to know.

" 'Course it's mine," says the kid, kind of swelling up like he was a balloon. "Dad gave it to me on my birthday."

"He must like you," says Catty.

"He gives me everything I ask for. You bet he likes me," the kid says.

"That must be because he knows you better than I do," says Catty. "Now I wouldn't give you an auto on your birthday. Uh-uh."

"From the looks of you, you couldn't give me a postage stamp."

"Never can tell from the looks of a bee how hard he can sting," says Catty.

"I got no time to talk to you," says the kid.

"I want some gas, and I want it quick. I got to get back to the lake."

"Go ahead," says Catty. "Nobody's got you chained. The quicker you get back to the lake the worse off the lake 'll be."

"I've a notion," says the kid, "to get out and bust you one."

"It's been done," says Catty. "But we've got a rule in this town. It says when anybody busts you one, you've got to bust him two right back again."

"Huh. My father had me taught to box by a professional."

Catty turned to me. "You take him on, Wee-wee. I'd like to see how a fellow fights that's been taught by a professional."

"Oh, two to one," says the kid.

"No," says Catty, "pick your choice. The odd man will hold the coats."

"I can't stop to whale you to-day. I've got to get back. Where's that gasoline place?"

"Go straight ahead," says Catty, "till you come to the first corner. Turn straight up and keep on until two o'clock. . . . Come on, Wee-wee. We've got business to attend to."

So off we walked, leaving that kid looking as if somebody had fed him a red pepper. Honest,

I thought he was going off like a firecracker. But Catty never looked back.

"Guess he's a millionaire," says I.

"If he is," says Catty, "then I don't want to be one."

"Wonder who he is?"

"Guess I know," Catty says.

"Who?"

"Son of that man that built the big house on the lake. Bought the old Ramsey Farm and fixed it up for a summer place. I heard they came yesterday."

"What's his name?"

"Toop," says Catty.

"Gosh," says I, "I wouldn't have a name like that for all his money."

"Names don't matter," says Catty. "It's what you do with them."

"Maybe," says I, "but Toop sounds like some kind of animal caught in the wilds of Australia."

Catty shook his head. "I feel it in my bones I'm going to have trouble with that kid."

Well, that was that, but the feeling Catty had in his bones was good prophecy. Trouble was what we had with Mister Toop. We had bushels of it. Toop! Now, how do you suppose he got that name. And his first name was

Adrian. Can you beat it? Adrian Toop. Oh, my aunt's cat's hind foot!

"Let's get busy," says Catty.

"Fine."

"Now, how can we use fifty dollars to make some more?"

"Start a lemonade stand," says I.

"Remember the last one we had?"

"Sure."

"How much did we make?"

"About two dollars in a week."

"Guess we won't tackle a lemonade stand," says he. "We got to think this out careful before we invest. First, we've got to make sure we won't lose money. That's the first rule of making money, or if it isn't, it ought to be. We've got to invest safely. Then we've got to see to it we make a good return on our money. What we want is a quick turnover."

"Anything like an apple turnover?" say I.

"A quick turnover means you put your money into something you can sell right off and make a profit and have your money back to invest in something else. The more often you turn your money over the more profit you make."

"Good," says I, "you turn it over to me, and

I'll turn it over to you again. That 'll be two turnovers. How much 'll we make on it?"

"Wee-wee," says Catty, "there are days when you're almost intelligent, but yesterday was the day. Maybe there 'll be another to-morrow, but to-day—well, to-day you better stay in the house, where nothing can hurt you."

"Can we hire folks to work for us?"

"That's fair," says he. "All capitalists do."

"Then," says I, "why not get some jobs mowing lawns? We can get, say fifty cents apiece. Then we can hire other kids to do the mowing for, say, forty cents. Give us ten cents profit on each lawn."

"Now," says Catty, "you're getting around toward an idea. Maybe to-day is one of your bright days."

"Well?" says I.

"No hurry. We'll talk it over, and think it over, and examine into all the investment opportunities that are open to us. It's bad to decide too quickly."

"All right," says I. "I've thought up something. Now you think up something."

"A fellow who can have one good idea, can have a dozen," says Catty. "That's what's wrong with so many folks. They get one good notion, and they rest on it. Your head's to

think with. It's there to make you get along in the world. So, Wee-wee, don't stop just because you got an idea. Get another and another and another. If you can make money out of one idea, you can make four times as much with four ideas."

"Sounds reasonable," says I. "Here goes. One, two, three—*Splash!*"

So there we sat, on the fence just this side of Catty's father's mills, and we thought and thought and thought. I didn't have another idea come to me, but pretty soon I saw one begin to blossom all over Catty.

"I guess I got something," says he. "What do you think of this?"

"Spill it," says I, "and we'll see."

CHAPTER TWO

I NEVER knew it was so hard to make money. Once I heard a man say that if you had money, it was easy to make more. Well, he didn't know what he was talking about. There were Catty and I. We had money. Fifty dollars. We started out to make a million. It was afternoon and we hadn't made a single cent! We'd been at it four whole hours and our fifty dollars wasn't a bit larger than it had been at the start.

"There," says I to Catty, "you see. You can't make money. Look at the day almost gone. It can't be done. I knew it couldn't."

"You've got to get an idea first," says he.

"What good is an idea?" says I. "You can't sell ideas."

"Can't, eh?" says he. "You can sell 'em quicker 'n anything else if they're any good. Look at the man who had an idea you could reap grain with a machine instead of with a scythe. Sold it, didn't he? And the man who thought up an automobile. It was just an idea in the beginning, but he sold it."

"That was inventing," says I, "and we're not inventors."

"Everything," says he, "that you think up is inventing."

"Well," says I, "just before lunch you said you had an idea. Now get busy with it. You haven't told me what it is yet."

"I was just working it into shape," says he.

"Is it worked?"

"Pretty nearly."

"Fit the rules—the one that we made up that we had to use our money to make more?"

"Yes."

"Then, for cat's sake, what is it?"

But before he could tell me an automobile stopped by us and a man hollered, "Hey, you kid."

We looked up to see what he wanted.

"Say," he says, "do you know anybody who has a rowboat for sale?"

"What kind of a rowboat?" says Catty.

"Why," says the man kind of sharp and domineering, "one with oars to it, that goes in the water."

"Um. . . ." says Catty, "you don't care whether it's flat-bottomed, round-bottomed, clinker, or what, eh?"

The man looked kind of blank, and you could

see he didn't know a rowboat from a poplar tree.

"What I want is a good safe rowboat," he says.

"I can sell you one," says Catty. "Twelve-foot boat, clinker bottom, two pairs of oars. Built of cedar. She's in fine shape, fresh painted."

"Where is it?"

"Still," says Catty, half to himself, "I dunno's I want to sell. Won't sell unless I get my price."

"Where can I see it?"

"I wouldn't let it go a cent less than thirty-five dollars," says Catty. "So if you don't want to pay that, you need't look at it at all."

"I guess I can stand thirty-five dollars," says the man kind of pompous-like.

"All right then, you be at the waterworks down on the bayou at three o'clock. I'll have her there."

"Can't we go now?" says the man.

"I'll have her there at three," says Catty. "It's the only boat I know of in town that's for sale. Three o'clock."

"All right," says the man, and off he drove in his car.

Then I turned to Catty. "What kind of a

joke are you playing on that fellow?" I wanted to know. "You don't own any more rowboats than a camel in the desert of Sahara. You never owned a rowboat. You never wanted to own a rowboat."

"But I'm going to own one in half an hour," says he.

"Build it?" says I, kind of sarcastic.

"No," says he, "I'm going to pick it off a rowboat vine."

"What 're you up to, anyhow?"

"Opportunity," says he.

"Fiddlesticks," says I.

"If you're going to be a financier, you've got to be ready to grab opportunities," says he. "As soon as this man says rowboat I knew it was a chance to make money."

"You as good as sold that man a boat, and you don't own any. He'll go down there at three o'clock, and you won't be there and the boat won't be there. Next time he sees you he'll chase you up the side of a house."

"You're no financier," says Catty.

"Maybe not, but I'm not your kind of a joker either."

"Come along," says Catty.

"Where?"

"Down to the waterworks."

"You don't mean you're going there?"

"You bet," says he.

"Leave me out," says I, "that man'll come, and he'll boot us both into the drink."

"Maybe not," he says kind of provoking, and of course I went along, because I couldn't very well do anything else. If Catty was going to get himself into a mess, I just naturally had to be along to kind of help out if there was any helping to be done.

We went to the engine room of the waterworks, and Catty says, "Afternoon, Mr. Friddle. How's the pump working to-day?"

"Same's usual," says Mr. Friddle.

"My," says Catty, "you keep that engine looking fine. It's a wonder more folks don't come down to look at it. One of the sights of the town, I say."

"Huh," says Mr. Friddle.

"Pike bitin'?" asked Catty.

"Too dry. Nothin's bitin'."

Then Catty turned and looked toward the bayou, which was maybe a hundred feet away. "Got a new boat?" he says, kind of astonished.

"Painted," says Mr. Friddle.

"Looks like new," says Catty.

"Good's new," says Mr. Friddle. "Fixed her up to sell."

"To sell? Honest?" Catty turned to me and says, "Don't you wish we owned a boat? Wish we had money enough to buy her. But boats cost a lot of money."

"This one don't," says Mr. Friddle. "It's dirt cheap."

"Maybe to you, Mr. Friddle, but what would be cheap to a man like you would be awful dear to us." He kind of hesitated like he was afraid to ask, and then he did ask, "How much you want for her?"

"Thutty dollars," says Mr. Friddle.

"I don't s'pose that's much for a fine boat like that, but thirty dollars! Say, Wee-wee, how much we got between us? We could dig up twenty-five, couldn't we?"

"I—I guess so," says I.

"Twenty-five," says Catty, as doleful as if he was going to his own funeral. " 'Tain't only five dollars less than thirty. Wouldn't take twenty-five dollars for her, Mr. Friddle?"

"G'wan and don't pester me," says Mr. Friddle.

So we went away, but not far. Catty took twenty-five dollars out of his pocket, and it was all in one-dollar bills. "I got 'em in ones on purpose," says he. "Fifty one-dollar bills look like a lot more money than two twenties and a ten."

"We'd better get out of here before that man comes."

"He isn't due till three," says Catty. "I'm going to let Mr. Friddle look at this money. There's folks who can't look at money without wanting it."

So back we went. Mr. Friddle was sitting outside the door, looking at the bayou. We didn't say a word, but sat down about ten feet away from him, and Catty took out the money.

"Let's count it," says he, "to make sure we haven't lost any."

We started in to count. Catty waved every bill around where Mr. Friddle could see it, and took a lot of time to it. He felt over every bill to see there weren't two sticking together.

"Twenty-five," says I. "It's all there."

"I didn't make it but twenty-four," says Catty. "We'll count it again."

We did. I made twenty-five the same as before, but Catty couldn't get past twenty-four. I was disgusted with him. "Say," I says, "what ails you? If you can't count to twenty-five you'd better go off in the woods and practice."

"There aren't but twenty-four," he says stubborn-like.

"There's twenty-five," says I.

Then Catty turned to Mr. Friddle. "Won't you please count this over for us?" he asked. "We can't seem to make it come out right."

Well, Mr. Friddle he counted, slow and like he was enjoying himself. He kind of patted every bill, and when he was through he let them lay on his lap like they were a pet cat.

"I make twenty-five," he says.

"I knew it," says I.

"What you goin' to do with all this money?" says Mr. Friddle.

"Put in the bank, I guess," says Catty.

"Um. . . ." He turned and looked at the boat. "Sure this is your'n to spend like you want to?"

"It belongs to us," says Catty.

"Your pas wouldn't be mad at me if I was to sell you my boat?"

"They'd like it," says Catty.

"Well," says Mr. Friddle, "twenty-five in the hand is worth thirty in the bush. Ye kin have the boat if you want her." Mr. Friddle was shoving the money into his pocket. I looked at Catty and he looked back and winked a large wink.

"We've bought a boat," says he. "Let's go look her over."

We did. Catty was grinning from one ear to the other. "I knew that old skeezicks would never let that real money get away, once he'd touched it," says he.

"How'd you know it?" says I.

"Oh," says Catty, "you have to study folks if you want to get along in this world. You got to know how they act."

"What I want to know," says I, "is how this other man 'll act. We've got twenty-five dollars tied up in a boat."

"He'll be along pretty soon now," says Catty.

Sure enough, along came the man, and Catty met him. Right in front of Mr. Friddle.

"Well," says the man, "where's your boat?"

"Right there," says Catty, pointing.

Mr. Friddle kind of pricked up his ears, and when we went down to look at the boat he tagged right after. The man made believe he knew a lot about boats. He poked her and rocked her and asked if she leaked and all that, but you could see a boat was a complete stranger to him.

"How much did you say it was?" he asked.

"Thirty-five dollars," says Catty. Mr. Friddle made a noise like somebody had stuck a pin in him.

"Give you thirty," says the man.

"Told you not to come if you wouldn't pay thirty-five," says Catty.

Mr. Friddle made another noise. Something must have been hurting him.

"Come on, Wee-wee," says Catty to me.

"Where you going?" says the man.

"Home," says Catty.

"I'll give you thirty-two-fifty," says the man.

Catty just walked off.

"All right," says the man, "I'll give you thirty-five to stop the argument."

There hadn't been any argument that I saw.

"Cash," says Catty.

The man took out his pocketbook and counted off three tens and a five. "There you are," he says. "Now this is my boat."

"For better and for worse," says Catty. "Much obliged. Afternoon."

We started off, but Mr. Friddle followed us, kind of moaning. "Hem," says he.

We stopped and he looked at us mournful and reproachful.

"Thutty-five dollars," says he.

"Thirty-five," says Catty.

"You *knowed* it," said Mr. Friddle.

Catty didn't say anything.

Mr. Friddle waggled his head. "Calc'late I'm a-losin' of my grip," he says to himself,

"when two kids can come along and horn-swoggle me in sich a way as this." He waggled his head some more. "Young feller," says he to Catty, "you want to watch out. You're goin' to end up either ownin' a bank or in jail—and I got a idee jail 'll be the place. . . . Thutty-five dollars. Ten dollars smouged off of me. By a kid."

"Fair and square, wasn't it?" says Catty.

"Mebby so," says Mr. Friddle, "but it was slick, all-fired slick." He went into the engine room, and the last we saw of him he was still waggling his head and saying over and over, "Thutty-five dollars. . . . Thutty-five dollars."

We walked toward home. "Well," says Catty, "our fifty has grown to sixty."

"The first day," says I. "That's five dollars apiece we've made. Pretty good wages. . . . Now what's your big idea?"

"It wasn't such a big one," says Catty, "just a kind of starter. Something to begin with. . . . Say, you said money couldn't make money, didn't you? Well, what did it just do?"

"Luck," says I

"Luck nothing," says Catty.

"What if that man had asked somebody else about boats?"

"Why," says Catty, "somebody else wouldn't

have had the money to seize the opportunity, or wouldn't have seen it was an opportunity, or they wouldn't have known how to work it. There isn't any luck about it. Everybody has chances, only they don't know they *are* chances. That's what's the matter with most folks who complain about their luck. What they ought to complain about is their brains."

"That isn't telling me your idea."

"All right," says he, "let's sit down and whittle, and I'll see what you think of it."

CHAPTER THREE

"THIS," says Catty, "isn't the Big Idea, not the one that's going to make our million. It's just one to be working at until the big one comes along."

"Well," says I, "if you don't get to telling what it is pretty soon, I'll be too old to work at it before I know what it is."

"It's this," says Catty. "Summer visitors."

"Board 'em?" says I.

"No," says Catty, "manicure their finger nails." He looked at me kind of irritated, so I shut up and waited. It's hard to do. "They're out there at the lake," says he, "working awful hard pretending they're having a good time. Maybe they are. Anyhow, they've got to eat, and they've got to eat every day. A lot of them would rather have things brought than to drive into town to get them. So here's the idea. We'll rent a horse and a light wagon, and we'll drive out every afternoon and take orders for anything. See? To be delivered in the morning. We can use our capital buying garden stuff and eggs and such-like to sell, and on the stuff they

order from stores we can charge extra for delivering. Maybe we won't make much, but we'll be making something, and all the time we can be keeping our eyes open for a place to invest our money."

"Sounds reasonable," says I.

"What we've got to keep in mind," says he, "is that we've got to keep our money working. Every dollar we have lying idle is a loafer."

"Sure," says I. "Where can we rent a nag?"

"That's easy," says he, "but before we rent one we'll try out the scheme. Take our bikes. We'll do it this afternoon. It isn't much of a ride and we can divide up the cottages and take orders. If it works out, then we can rent a horse. If it doesn't, we'll have to think up something else."

"Fine," says I. "Let's get busy."

"All business will be C. O. D.," says Catty.

"You bet," says I.

So we got our bicycles and started off. The road ran out beside the river, and then branched off to skirt the big swamp. It passed through Six Mile Woods, and then came out on the lake. It was a pretty good road as roads go and we hustled along average spry. We were just crossing the corner of Six Mile Woods when a

man stepped out of a clump of bushes and stood in the road. He looked at us sharp.

"Where you goin'?" says he.

I was kind of scared, because it was a lonely place, but Catty didn't seem to get any steam up at all. "We're going to the lake," he says.

"Pass anybody on the road?" the man asked.

"Several," says Catty. "Why?"

"See a kind of funny-lookin' feller with big bug-eye specs?"

"No."

The man turned and spoke to somebody back in the bushes. "Either he ain't come yet, or else he's ahead of us," he says.

"He's ahead, all right," says the other.

That was all of that. We rode along kind of wondering.

"Now what d'ye s'pose those men were after?" says Catty.

"Funny-lookin' feller with specs," says I.

"Why were they after him? Who were they? I didn't much care for that man's looks."

"No idea why they were after him. Maybe they're deputies," says I.

"Didn't act like it," says Catty. "I'll bet something is up."

"Maybe," says I, "and it can be higher up so long as it doesn't interfere with us."

But right then I had a feeling. If something was up in the neighborhood, Catty Atkins would be in it or bust. He was the greatest meddler I ever saw, and trouble came and sat on his lap like it was a cat and he offered to scratch its head. I didn't like the looks of things from that minute.

"Wish we hadn't come out this road," says I.

"Why?"

"Because," says I, "we're going to land in another muddle."

"You give me a pain, Wee-wee Moore," says Catty. "What's the use living if you can't be in things? We've been in several, haven't we, and got a lot out of them."

"I've had enough to last me," says I. "Maybe you like being scared to death, but I don't. I'm for peace and quiet."

"Peace and quiet 's about all we'll get this summer," says he. Then he stopped and got off his bike. "What's that?" he says.

"What's what?" I asked him.

He pointed, and I looked. What I saw looked like the back part of a man who was crawling along on all fours. The thing moved.

"Let's take a look," says Catty.

"Nix," says I, "I'm taking orders for garden stuff, not for inmates of menageries."

"It's no animal," says he.

"So much the worse," says I, "I don't want anything to do with a man who crawls around in these woods on all fours. Maybe he wouldn't fit into a menagerie, but he'd go fine in a lunatic asylum."

"What," says Catty, "if he turned out to be an escaped lunatic?"

"I'll tell you what," says I. "If he did turn out that way, you'd have to ride your bike awful fast to keep up with me."

"Let's take a look," says he.

"There's nothing I want to see," I says.

"All right," he says, "stay there and wait for me."

He dropped his bike and started into the woods. I held back a minute, because I didn't have any hankering to get acquainted with any crazy men. I never like that kind. No telling what they'll do. But Catty went right along, and there wasn't anything for me to do but to follow after him. It wasn't any fun, and I didn't expect to get any fun out of it, and I was so scared my teeth sounded like a telegraph office. But it wouldn't look right to let Catty go boggling off alone.

I went so as to be ready to turn and scoot if the lunatic made a move toward us. It's all right to be brave, but I'll bet more brave men get into hospitals than men who use some common sense. All you get by being brave is a medal; what you get by being cautious is good health.

Catty went mogging along, but as he got closer to the thing, whatever it was, he went slower and kind of sneaked up on it Indian style. I sneaked, too, only more so. We cut across and came up in front of it, and there, sure enough, was a man on all fours crawling along as if his life depended on it.

"Howdy-do?" says Catty.

The man looked up and blinked. He wore the biggest round glasses I ever saw, and his eyes were round and a kind of soft blue, and altogether he looked a lot like a baby—sort of vague and helpless. "Er—how do you do?" he says.

"I'm pretty well," says Catty. "Were you looking for something?"

"Er—exactly. Precisely. I am, as you rightly observe, looking for something."

"Did you drop it?" says I.

"No," said the young man slowly, blinking at us through his specs, "I can't say that I

dropped it. As a matter of fact I couldn't have dropped it, because I never had it. In any event I couldn't have carried it."

"No?" says Catty. "What was it?"

"A hiding place," said the young man.

"To hide in?" says I.

"My understanding of hiding places," said the stranger, "is that they may be utilized for the purpose of hiding."

"How—how did you escape?" says I.

"Escape?" he looked at me sort of puzzled. "Oh—er—I haven't escaped—not completely escaped. That is my purpose. I desire to escape, utterly and completely."

"You can't escape very fast if you keep on crawling," says I.

"Crawling is the way to escape," he said severely. "It is the technically correct method. Invariably Indians, who are admitted to be the stealthiest of human beings—I say, invariably Indians crawl when they wish to escape. I have read descriptions of it in books. Now, then, if the most skilled of humans crawl, then crawling must be best way to do it. Therefore I crawl. It is difficult to descry a crawling figure in the woods."

"We descried you," says I.

"That," said the young man, "was unfor-

tunate. Possibly due to faulty technique on my part. I am not an expert crawler. Indeed I cannot remember ever to have crawled about in the woods before to-day."

"Why did you start to-day?"

"Because this is the first occasion upon which I have desired to escape."

"From whom?"

The young man looked at us and sort of wrinkled his eyes and tried to look shrewd, but he couldn't do it worth a cent. "From the persons I desire to avoid," he said.

"Keepers" said I, and Catty looked at me with a scowl.

"Keepers? Er—not exactly. Not precisely." Then he straightened his shoulders and sat back on his haunches. "Young man, what sort of keepers do you mean? Answer me at once. I trust you do not refer to that species of keepers who have in charge the mentally unbalanced."

"Of course *not,*" said I.

"I should have resented that very much. I am not mentally unbalanced. I am in full possession of all my faculties. I may, without fear of successful contradiction, assert that my mental faculties are somewhat—somewhat above the ordinary."

"Yes," says Catty, "that's the way you look to me. But if you're going to escape, and we're to help you, we've got to know something about it. . . . We passed two men a mile back who were looking for somebody. Said it was a man with glasses. Are you the one?"

"I rather fancy so," said the young man. "It would be extraordinary if there were two fugitives in this immediate section. Fugitives are not common. Nor, if I may say so, is it ordinary for me to be a fugitive. I've never done it before. I do not enjoy it."

"What made you escape, then?" says I.

"I have not escaped. That must be clear. If there are persons on my track, then I am still in a condition of endeavoring to escape. It would be incorrect to maintain that I have made good my escape until all pursuit has been abandoned as futile."

"That sounds logical," says Catty. "But who are these pursuers?"

"They are very troublesome and disagreeable persons."

"I'll bet they are. Why do they want to catch you?"

"A-ha," said the young man with a second effort to be very cunning and secretive, "that would be telling. That would be telling."

"Listen here," said Catty, "if you're all right, we are willing to help you out. But we've got to know. Are you running away from the sheriff or anything like that?"

"Am I, do you mean—a malefactor? A criminal? To that I can only answer with scorn that I am not."

"Well, then, are you getting away because you've done something you are ashamed of?"

"I'm endeavoring to escape," said the young man, "because I've done something I am rather —and justly so—proud of."

"Never heard of such a thing," says I.

"I venture to assert that I could name a considerable number of things and events you have never heard of," said the young man sharply.

Catty turned to me. "He's all right," he said. "You can tell that by looking at him. Just got into some kind of a mess. We've got to help him out. He'll lose himself in here alone, or get caught sure."

"I am lost at this minute," said the stranger. "On the whole, that is desirable in my situation. The more lost I am the more difficult I shall be to find."

"Have you any idea where you are going?"

"Not the slightest. I alighted from the train in a town whose name I do not know—hur-

riedly. I abandoned my baggage. Almost immediately I set about escaping, and here I am."

"Say," says Catty, "let's get back under cover. Those men might come along any time. Our bikes are out in the road, too. That 'll attract attention."

"Before we go any farther in this matter," said the young man, "do you know an individual who wears the name of Toop?"

"Toop?" we both stared at him. "Sure we know who he is. He lives out on the lake—summer camper."

"Then I bid you a good afternoon," said the young man. "No friend of Mr. Toop can be a friend of mine."

"But we're not friends of Mr. Toop," said Catty. "I'm going to give his son a good licking before I'm done with him."

"That," said the stranger, "puts a different complexion upon the matter. I shall be glad to avail myself of your assistance."

"Duck," said Catty quickly. "Roll behind that log, quick. *Roll!* They're coming along the road."

CHAPTER FOUR

I LOOKED toward the road, and there were two men going along slowly and peering into the woods on both sides of them. One was the man who had stopped us a while back. I sneaked a look at the man with the big glasses. He'd scroutched down back of a big rotten log. I guessed he couldn't be seen from the woods.

"Come along," says Catty to me.

"Where?"

"Road," says he, and then to Mr. Glasses, "We'll be back as soon as we get rid of those men."

I couldn't see any sense to walking out where the men were, but I trotted along after Catty. The men had stopped by our bikes and were waiting for us.

"Hello," says Catty.

"What you doing back in the woods?" asked one of the men suspiciously.

"Studying zoology," says Catty with a sober face. "We thought we saw a funny-looking animal as we rode along, so we went in to get

a look. The only way to learn about the habits of animals is to watch them in their native state."

"H'm, we're looking for an animal, too," says the other fellow. "Haven't seen anything of a young man with specs, have you?"

"Big round glasses that made him look like an owl?" says Catty.

"That's the ticket. Where'd you see him?"

"In the bank, back in town," says Catty.

"When?"

"When we rode past."

The men looked at each other and scowled. "He's behind us, then. Maybe he didn't come out this road at all. You saw him in the bank, kid. What time?"

"Less than an hour ago," says Catty, "we saw a young man with big, round glasses on. He was standing in the bank window."

That was true, too. We did see just such a man, but he was Tommy Jenks, the cashier. However, Catty didn't explain that. The men talked a minute and then turned back toward town. They seemed pretty mad about something.

Well, we waited for them to get way out of sight and then we went back to where our man was lying behind his log.

"You can stand up now, if you want to," says Catty.

"Er—thank you, young man. The posture I was compelled to assume was most irksome." He paused a minute and looked at us kind of owlish. "May I inquire your names?" he says.

Catty told him, and then he said his name was Pawky—Harbottle Pawky. It looked like the kind of name he ought to have.

"Will you," said he, "join me in a—er—light luncheon?" And with that he unwrapped a package under his arm and drew out a box of chocolates, a pound of cheese, a bottle of pickles, and a package of fancy cookies. "I have not eaten," he says, "since last night."

"Well," says Catty, "you ought to make out a fair breakfast now—if your insides will stand the strain. I'm a pretty fair eater myself, but I never remember mixing candy and cheese and pickles to start off the day."

The young man stared at his food like he was surprised to see what it was. "It does seem a trifle ill selected," he said. "Nevertheless, it is food. Nobody can deny that it is food. I—er—was in too great haste to make a thoughtful selection. However, I shall eat it. If I observe any ill effects I shall, in future, avoid a meal made of these articles."

His appetite was good. He began with the candy, and we helped him some there. Then he started on the cheese. Catty and I weren't any use at all on the cheese. But Mr. Pawky did a pretty good job. Next he went for the crackers, and ended up with half a dozen pickles. It seemed like he wasn't able to eat but one thing at a time.

"Now," says he, "if I had a drink of water, I should feel greatly refreshed and invigorated."

"It isn't how you feel now," says Catty. "It's how you're going to feel when those things find out they're neighbors in your stummick!"

"My digestion," says Mr. Pawky, "is remarkable."

"It's got to be," says Catty. He scratched his nose like he does often when he has something on his mind. "What's worrying me," he says, "is what in tunket we're going to do with you."

"You are under no obligation to do anything with me."

I snickered. "He couldn't help it. He's exposed and he's bound to come down with it. He can't get near anybody in trouble without catching it himself, and I usually get it from him."

"My desire," says Mr. Pawky, "is to conceal myself."

"We kind of guessed it," says Catty. "What you got in that box?"

The young man looked suspicious-like at Catty. "That box," says he, "is private and personal."

"To be sure," says Catty, "and it's got in it what those men are chasing you to get."

"I do not admit it," says Mr. Pawky.

"You don't have to," says Catty. "How long have you got to hide?"

"For an indefinite period," says Mr. Pawky.

"Um. . . . Then we've got to put you some place handy. You've got to be fed, and we can't go traipsing all over the county to look after you. . . . Lemme see." He thought a minute, and then he turned to me. "How about the lighthouse?" he says.

The lighthouse was a good place. It was a kind of a funny place, too. There used to be a man lived out on the lake by the name of General Gumble, and I guess he was kind of upset in his head. He lived off to one side where nobody else was, and his house was on a kind of rocky point. Off the end of the point was a little island, all over rocks, and he built him a lighthouse there. He said an island like that

ought to have a lighthouse on it, because it was a menace to navigation. Maybe it was, but there wasn't any navigation on our lake. Nothing but a few rowboats in that day, and everybody knew about the point, anyhow, and it wasn't the general thing to be out in a rowboat in a storm or in the dark when you couldn't see. But General Gumble had to have his lighthouse, anyhow. He built it out of brick and painted it white, and every night he used to hang a lantern up in the top of it. It was a round lighthouse, maybe a dozen feet across at the base and about thirty feet high. You had to go up a ladder inside of it, and there were three rooms, one above the other. It was about as good a place to hide in as you could find, because it was away from the place where all the cottages were, and nobody was likely to go near it.

So I says to Catty, "The lighthouse is jest the frog's hind legs," says I.

So we started out, Catty and I walking our bikes, and Harbottle Pawky lugging his big box, which seemed to be pretty heavy, and panting along behind us. We had to rest quite a lot. We hid our bikes in the bushes after a while and cut across to Lighthouse Island. The island wasn't more than a dozen feet off the

point, and you could get to it by stepping from rock to rock. At any rate, Catty and I could, but Mr. Pawky wasn't much of a stepper.

"Better let us lug that box over," says Catty. "You can get along easier if you do."

But he wouldn't. He hung on to it like grim death to a tomcat, and about half the time he was wading up to his waist. If he wanted to be stubborn, it wasn't any skin off my nose. But if he'd stepped in a hole and hung on to that box, he'd have been anchored to the bottom so firm you'd have to get a derrick to haul him up.

We got over to the lighthouse and found the old door loose on its hinges. It was easy to get in. It was kind of dark inside, and about as dusty and dirty and cobwebby as any place I ever saw. I guess it could hold the cobweb championship of the world.

"Needs a little house-cleaning," says Catty, "but you can make it pretty comfortable."

"There's no bed," says Mr. Pawky, like he was too astonished to get over it.

"No," says Catty, "there *isn't* a bed, now I come to notice it, and the bathroom is out of order, so you can't have hot and cold water. I wouldn't be surprised if the electric lights were off, too. . . . Say, Mister Pawky, what did you

expect? Elevators and a chambermaid? I thought you wanted to hide."

"I do," says Mr. Pawky, "but I should like to do it as comfortably as possible."

"Well," says Catty, "this is as comfortable as possible, and maybe a little more so. We'll show you how to make a bed of balsam twigs, and we can help you rig up some furniture and clean out the mess. Next time we come we'll fetch a broom. Give you something to occupy your mind with."

"My mind," says Mr. Pawky, severe-like, "is amply occupied."

He looked all around and poked into corners and waggled his head. "Admirable place," he said finally, "perfectly adapted to my needs. I can carry on my experiments ——" and there he stopped quick and squinted at us.

"You can carry on any way you want to," says Catty, "just so you aren't too noisy about it. . . . Now we've got business to look after, and you're safe. We'll be back before dark with some truck you'll need. In the meantime you'd better lay kind of low, and don't go prowling around or you'll lose yourself again. You're the kind of man that wants to stay put in one spot and hang on to *that* with both hands,

so it won't move off and leave him. . . . See you before dark."

We scrambled back to shore and got our bikes out of the bushes and started for the summer camps.

"What d'ye make of him?" says Catty.

"His egg's addled," says I.

"I'm not so sure. Wonder what he's got in that box."

"Solid gold lightnin' rods," says I, kind of sarcastic.

"Huh. . . . And he wanted to know if we were friends of Mr. Toop. What's Toop got to do with it?"

"We might ask him," says I.

"I'll bet you," says Catty, "we've hit on something mighty important. I'll bet—say, I'll bet there is going to be excitement in these parts."

"I don't need any excitement," says I. "What I love is peace and quiet. Besides, we're going to be busy making our million."

"You can't put in all your time making money," says Catty. "You have to have recreation."

"Your idea of recreation," says I, "is being chased by a pack of wolves. Me, when I enjoy myself, I like to do it where nobody's after me with a shotgun."

"Fiddlesticks," says he. And then, "Well, we got to get our minds down to business. There's the first cottage. You tackle this row and I'll move on to the next. Got your order book and pencil?"

"Sure," says I.

"Go to it, then," says he, "and let's see who's the best salesman."

CHAPTER FIVE

IT took us maybe an hour and a half to canvass the cottages and we did pretty well. Quite a few folks liked the idea of having regular deliveries and of finding somebody to do their shopping. I was tickled to death, for out of my row of cottages I figured I had orders for as much as a hundred dollars' worth of stuff. Catty came along, and he had as much as I did, if not more.

"I'll bet we make a lot of money out of this," says I.

"Um. . . . Wait till we see how it comes out," he says. "Remember, we've got to figure in horse rent."

"But where," says I, "does capital come in? This looks to me like just work—taking orders and delivering them."

"The capital comes in when we buy the stuff," he says, "and that's where I hope we'll make the money."

"Show me," says I.

"Well," he says, "there's eggs. We've got orders for along about twenty dozen eggs. The

market price of eggs in the store is fifty cents a dozen. Now we go to somebody with eggs and, instead of buying retail, we buy wholesale. Maybe for forty-five cents a dozen. See? That's using our capital to make five cents on every twelve eggs. If we just delivered we wouldn't make that money. All we would get would be pay for delivering."

"Ten per cent of what the thing costs," says I.

"No," says he, "ten per cent of the market price."

"Well," says I, "let's get busy and see just what we do clean up."

The outcome of it was that we rented a horse for fifteen dollars a week with a rickety wagon. It wasn't much, but it would do. Then we got together our orders. First, we ask what things cost, to get the market value, and then we haggled to get wholesale price, explaining what we were up to. Almost everybody saw that it would be a pretty good thing, so grocers and folks like that gave us a good discount. The market price of the stuff we bought came to fifty-three dollars and twenty-four cents. We managed to buy it for forty-eight dollars and four cents. I was disappointed when I saw what it came to, because I was sure all those

orders would add up to a couple of hundred, like I said. But you never can tell. Anyhow, there was five dollars and twenty cents gain, and when you added the ten per cent for delivering to that, it made a total of ten dollars and thirty-two cents. Of course we had to subtract from that what the horse and wagon cost, or two dollars and a half a day. That left us a net profit of seven dollars and eighty-two cents.

"Huh," says I, "that isn't much toward a million."

"It's better than a kick in the ear," says Catty. "If we can keep it up for three months it 'll be close to seven hundred dollars, which isn't bad for a couple of kids. And it's just a side line, too. When we really get into business we can hire somebody to do that part of the work. Maybe pay some trustworthy kid ten dollars a week to do it."

"You don't think much of trustworthy kids, do you?" says I.

"Why?" says he.

"You'd pay one less a day than we're paying a busted down horse."

He kind of thought that over, and you could see it puzzled him some, but he didn't have a word to say about it.

As we went along the street I noticed a lot of

signs stuck up, saying there was going to be a ball game between our town and Hopville Wednesday afternoon.

"Doggone," says I.

"Why?" says he.

"We'll miss all the ball games," says I.

"Well," he says kind of resigned, "you can't tend to business and baseball all at once." And then he hit me a lick on the back. "Say, Wee-wee, I dunno but what we can," he says.

"How?"

"You stick here a jiffy, and I'll tell you," says he.

He jumped on his bike and off he went like the dickens. In ten minutes he was back again with a grin as broad as a barn door.

"I got it," says he.

"Got what?"

"What I went after," he says.

"I hope you got it good," says I, "and I hope it was a crack in the eye."

"It wasn't. It's a pop-corn wagon. Remember old Jake Towsey—one-legged man that used to peddle pop corn with a two-wheeled wagon? Kind of a glass thing with a gas burner in it?"

"Yes," says I.

"I thought maybe his widow might have the

thing some place, and she did. I looked it all over, and a little tinkering and paint will make it as good as new. So I bought it. She let me have it for seven dollars and a half."

"What's that got to do with baseball?" says I.

"We'll sell pop corn at the ball games," he says. "There are three games a week."

"But who'll look after the delivery business?"

"We'll take turns," he says. "Or maybe we can do it all in the morning, and have afternoons free."

"Fine," says I. "So now we're in two businesses."

"And we'll be in more," he says. "That's what I want. I want to get in a lot of things, and hire other folks to do the work, so you and I won't have to do anything but have a kind of an office some place and manage the whole shooting match."

"That sounds fine," says I. "Hop right to it. Sitting in an office and managing is a job I'm just cut out for. I can eat that kind of a job."

We got our orders loaded in the wagon and were ready to start for the lake. Of a sudden Catty says, "Tunket! We most forgot Harbottle. We haven't his things."

"What 'll he need?" I wanted to know.

"Blankets and a broom and some dishes. There's an old oil stove in our barn for him to cook on, and a lantern."

"All right," says I, "but there's no money in it."

"You never can tell," says Catty, "what there's money in."

So we put on that stuff for Harbottle Pawky, and off we went. We didn't forget to put in something for him to eat, either.

"Maybe," says I, "he's got some money, and then we can take his orders like we do everybody else's."

"Sure," says Catty, but he didn't seem very much interested in that part of it.

We delivered our stuff to everybody before supper. At first we hadn't intended delivering before the next morning, but we had Mr. Pawky on our hands and had to make the trip, so we killed two birds with one stone. It meant we could take orders as we went along and not have to deliver again until day after tomorrow—unless somebody needed something pressing.

When we were all through, we drove as close to the lighthouse as we could, and kind of hid our wagon among the trees so it wouldn't attract attention, and began to lug supplies in to

Harbottle Pawky. He seemed sort of glad to see us.

"It's rather lonely, isn't it?" he said.

"You wanted to be lonely," says Catty. "You can't hide and have a party at the same time."

"True," says Mr. Pawky. "That is very true, but regrettable. Not that I crave society. I am not one who must always be in a crowd, but I have not seen a living soul since you left."

"Which," says I, "proves you've found a good place to hide."

"How did the pickles and cheese and candy get along?" says Catty.

"Er—why, I have been unaware of them. Indeed, I have eaten the rest of the box of candy."

"Wee-wee," says Catty, "this is a remarkable man. I knew it the minute I set eyes on him. Now let's get busy and start housekeeping. How are you with a broom, Mr. Pawky?"

"My experience with a broom," said the young man, "has been exceedingly slight. I do not recall ever to have made use of such an implement."

"Well, that's where your education is going to be improved." He handed over the broom. "This end is the handle," he says. "You grab hold of that and use the other end to sweep

with. Better sprinkle the floors before you start or you'll choke with the dust."

Mr. Pawky started in to sweep, and you could see right off that it wasn't his strong holt. He was about as good at sweeping as I am at taking castor oil. I was going to take the broom and show him how it ought to be done, but Catty wouldn't let me. He said Pawky had to learn, and now was as good a time as any other.

While he was trying to clean up, Catty and I lugged in the blankets and stove and the rest of the things, and Pawky looked more and more bewildered.

"You don't expect me to cook?" he says, kind of cross-like.

"Not," says Catty, "if you feel like hiring a chef. But, so far as I can see, the only way you're going to get anything to eat, is to cook it."

"But I never cooked a morsel."

Catty stopped and looked at him, and then he says, in that patient voice of his which means he isn't patient at all, "Say what *can* you do?"

"Young man," says Mr. Pawky, as dignified as a turkey gobbler, "I am an electrical engineer. I am a very good electrical engineer. Indeed, if the truth must be told, I believe I am the best electrical engineer in America."

"I do love a modest man," says Catty. "It must take brains to be one of those things, so you can use them learning how to cook. I'll show you. It's easy to make coffee, and flapjacks. Anybody can cook meat and potatoes. . . . Say, have you any money?"

"What need have I of money? I'm hiding. In this lonely spot there is nothing to spend money for."

"Oh," says Catty. "Then you figure to fish for your food? Or pick it off trees?"

"A-hem. . . . Very true. I will require food. But there is no store, and I dare not go into town."

"Our business," says Catty, "is supplying folks with what they need. Just give us your order and we'll fill it. Cash on delivery."

"You needn't pay for the stove and the blankets. But we had to buy the cooking things and the rest," says I. "It came to six dollars and twenty cents."

"I'm sure I'm obliged to you," says Mr. Pawky. "Fortunately, I have plenty of money. Here is a twenty-dollar bill. When that is used up apply to me for more."

We worked like beavers and got the old lighthouse cleaned out so it was fit to live in. We fixed up the top floor, where the light used to be,

for a bedroom. The second floor was a kind of a parlor, though there wasn't any furniture in it but a busted table, and the first floor was kitchen and dining room all in one.

"How are you going to spend your days?" says Catty. "You have to pass the time somehow?"

"I shall invent something," says Mr. Pawky. "I welcome the leisure and the quiet. I can sit and think, which is the way to arrive at inventions."

"No," says I, "honest? Are you an inventor? Did you ever invent anything—that was any good?"

He looked at me kind of queer, and then he says, "Sometimes I wish I hadn't. Inventing is what got me in all this vexatious mess."

"Honest?" says I.

"Yes," says he.

"What?" says I.

"Doubtless, even in this rural district," says he, "you have heard of the radiophone?"

"We have," says I. "Did you invent it?"

"No," he says, "but I have invented something which multiplies its value. I have solved its most troublesome problem. I have perfected a device, a never-failing device, to eliminate static."

"Do tell," says I. "You can eliminate static, eh? What d'ye think of that! . . . He can eliminate static, Catty."

"Aw, shut up," says Catty. "You never heard of static."

"That makes two of us," I says. "And now, Mr. Pawky, if you will tell us what in tunket static is, then we'll get all excited about eliminating it."

He started off with a string of long words and outlandish stuff that didn't mean any more to me than the chattering of a squirrel. It didn't to Catty, either. Just because we didn't understand it right off, Mr. Pawky got provoked and told us we were exceedingly dull. That's what he said, "exceedingly dull."

"All right," says Catty, "how do you make biscuit?"

"I don't know," says he.

"I'll explain," says Catty. "You take a sifter full of flour and put in two teaspoonfuls of soda and one of cream of tartar and one of salt, and then you put in enough lard to make it flake and add enough milk so it will roll out the way you want it to. Then you cut it with a biscuit cutter, and dip it in melted lard and bake it till it's done. And now you can make biscuits."

"I cannot," says Mr. Pawky. "I haven't the least idea what you are talking about."

"Then," says Catty, "you are exceedingly dull."

Mr. Pawky grinned. It was the first time he had smiled since we got acquainted with him. "I see," says he. "Maybe neither of us is so exceedingly dull as circumstances would seem to indicate."

"Glad's that's settled. Now, what's static?"

He explained some more, and we gradually got the idea that static was electricity kind of hanging around to interfere with radiophones, and it made a noise in the instrument so you couldn't hear an opera singer singing three hundred miles away. If there wasn't any static you could always hear clearly, and your radio outfit would be about ten times as good as it is. But exactly what static *was* we didn't find out. Anyhow, it was a fine thing to eliminate. And Mr. Pawky could do it.

"Is your invention worth any money?" says Catty.

"Millions," says Pawky.

"Sufferin' catfish!" says I.

"And that," says Pawky, "is why I'm in hiding."

"I've got it," says Catty to me. "Somebody's

trying to steal his invention away from him, and he's afraid. That's it."

"That," says Mr. Pawky, "is it. And the man's name is Toop, and he's one of the biggest manufacturers of electrical appliances in the world."

"Christmas!" says I.

"He almost had me," says Mr. Pawky, "but I got away and ran."

"You ran the wrong way," says Catty. "Mr. Toop lives about three miles from here. . . . Say, is it your invention you've got in that heavy box?"

"It is my device and all the drawings that go with it."

"Then," says Catty, "if I were you, I'd find some good safe place to hide."

"Where?" says Mr. Pawky.

"Let's bury it like treasure," says I.

"No," says Catty, "I know where there's a little cave, and we can find a place inside of it where we can hide the dingus so nobody'll ever find it. It isn't more than twenty minutes' walk. Grab it and come on."

We did. It was heavy going, especially when we started to climb the steep hill. But finally we got there. You couldn't see any cave till Catty showed us where it was—just a slit in

the rocks. We squeezed through. It was kind of dark-like, but we lighted the lantern Catty had brought along. It was a rocky cave. We pried off a good-sized chunk of stone and worked out some more behind it, till we made a sort of closet about two feet deep. In this we put the box with the invention, and then we set back the first stone. It looked as if there wasn't anything there at all.

"There," says Catty, "that's safe, anyhow."

"We got to be getting back," says I.

"First we'll show Mr. Pawky how to get his supper," says Catty. Which we did. I don't believe it did him a bit of good. Then we lit out for home, but we promised to see him the next day, or the day after at the very latest. And we did. I'll say we saw him with a vengeance.

CHAPTER SIX

EARLY next morning we went over early and got the old pop-corn cart out of the barn and hauled it over to Catty's house. It needed a lot of cleaning and painting, but we went at it, and before we were done, it looked as good as new.

"Shall we try it out at the ball game this afternoon?" I asked.

"Sure," says Catty.

"Looks like kind of a small job for two," says I.

"If we have good luck," he says, "one of us will be kept busy popping all the time while the other sells."

"Hope so," says I. "And I hope there'll be a good crowd at the game."

"There ought to be. Most of the summer visitors are in their cottages and they always come to the games."

"Say," I says, and I was surprised almost to death to have an idea, "I'll bet we could sell a lot of pop corn Saturday nights when the band plays in the square. Everybody's

in town then from all the country around here."

"Fine," says Catty.

We bought us a bushel of pop corn and a bag of salt. I smouged enough butter out of the ice box, which Catty says was too much like high finance, but he let it go for once.

"As soon as we get our enterprises going," says Catty, "we're going to need an office."

"Enterprises!" says I. "That's a regular word, isn't it?""

"It's a good word," says Catty, kind of severe. "We'd better figure out where we can have an office, too."

"There's the little shack where the cobbler's shop used to be. Right on Main Street, too."

"Fine," says Catty. "I'll bet we can get it cheap."

"I'll bet," says I, "we can get it for nothing. It belongs to Dad."

"No," says he. "We're in business. Whatever we have we've got to pay for. It wouldn't be businesslike to take anything for nothing. Find out what your father will rent it to us for."

Dad kind of laughed when I told him about it, but he got the idea right off and said we could have it for a dollar a week, and so we agreed

to rent it. I kind of thought Catty was getting the cart before the horse—renting an office before we had anything to do in one, but he said he believed in taking care of the future.

Well, there was a good crowd at the game that afternoon, about four hundred people, and we sold a hundred and four bags of corn. That was five dollars and twenty cents, and if you don't count overhead, as Catty called it, our profit was most of the five dollars.

"What's overhead?" says I.

"It's what it costs to run your business. Office rent and interest and insurance and salaries of officials."

"Are you and I the officials?"

"Yes," says he.

"Well, so far my salary hasn't done any damage to the overhead," says I.

"No," he says, "but we've got to figure interest on the money we've got invested. On the cost of the pop-corn cart."

"That," says I, "would be about forty cents a year."

"It doesn't matter how small it is. We've got to figure it just the same. And we've money invested in pop corn, and a dollar a week rent. It's all got to come out of the profits. And we've got to figure depreciation, too."

"Golly," says I, "what's that?"

"This pop-corn cart won't last forever, will it?"

"No."

"How long?"

"Two or three years, maybe."

"Say three years," he says. "That means we have to charge off two dollars and a half every year for depreciation. It's worth that much less. Then, at the end of the third year, we've charged it all off."

"What if it lasts four years?" says I.

"Then," says he, "we're in luck."

But about that ball game. We pushed over our cart and started to do business. Folks seemed to like the idea, but every once in a while somebody stopped and asked if we didn't have something cold to drink, and several people asked if there wasn't a place where they could get ice cream cones.

"Looks," says Catty, "like we've got to expand."

"Expand how?"

"To take care of the demand for drinks and ice cream."

"Can't lug 'em around in this cart," says I.

"No," he says, "but we can build a stand. And we will," he says. "We can put it up right

next the gate, and we can sell lots of things besides ice cream and drinks. Make a regular refreshment store of it."

"Have to have more help," says I.

"Looks that way. Wish there was a game every day. Three days a week aren't enough. But after the first week we can figure about how much we'll sell. Maybe we'll lose money the first week. But," he says, "you have to pay for experience."

"Huh," says I, "most of the stock won't spoil. We can cart it down to our office the days there isn't a game, and run a store there."

"Wee-wee," says Catty, "you do come through with an idea once in a while. There's quite a piece of ground alongside the office. I've got a big square canvas, and we can rig it up for a kind of open-air ice cream parlor. Say, our business *is* growing up!"

That was pretty good for two days, I thought, but Catty wasn't satisfied. Next morning we were up early and started for the lake with the orders we had for that day. It wasn't so much as the first time by a lot, but it was something, and on the way we passed Old Mister Barnes coming into town with a wagon full of red raspberries. Catty stopped.

"What you got there, Mister Barnes?" he says.

"Take a look. Take a look. What ye think they be, brickbats to build chimneys?"

"They look like raspberries," says Catty.

"They be," says Mister Barnes, smacking his lips and puckering up his eyes. "That's what makes 'em look that way."

"Selling them?" asked Catty.

"No. Jest takin' 'em for a ride in the cool of the mornin'." Mister Barnes always talked that way, and his eyes were all wrinkled up with grinning at his own kind of jokes. "Berries has to be given rides and treated right, or they won't work."

"Um. . . . How much a quart are you asking?"

"Wa-al, when I git around to ask, I calc'late I'll say about a shillin'."

"If we were to buy twenty-four boxes, how much would you call them?"

"Dunno. If you was to take that many, I figger I'd have to call the doctor."

"We don't expect to eat them all," says Catty. "But if you'll make the price right, we'll take two dozen."

"Cash?"

"Here it is," says Catty.

"Two dollars 'n a half 'll take 'em," says Mister Barnes. Everybody called him that—Old Mister Barnes. I've heard he signed his letters that way, but I never happened to see one to tell for sure.

We paid for the berries and transferred them into our wagon, and drove on. Mister Barnes sat quite a while looking after us, wondering, I expect, what we were up to. But we didn't say.

The easiest thing we ever did was to sell those berries as we delivered our orders, and for fifteen cents a quart. Made a nice extra profit.

"There," says Catty, "you see the idea of having capital. If we hadn't had the money to buy those berries, we never would have made thirty-three and a third per cent profit on them. That," says he, "was finance."

"Oh," I says, "that's how it works, is it? Well, next time let's buy something for fifty dollars and sell it for seventy-five."

"I'm hoping," says he "to buy something for a thousand dollars one of these days, and sell it for fifteen hundred. That would be making money, wouldn't it?"

"Do we call on Mr. Harbottle Pawky today?" says I.

"We'd better. If we don't he'll starve, or poison himself," says Catty. "Wonder what he's been living on?"

"Cookies," says I, "we put in a couple of boxes."

"We'd better find out," says Catty. "Seen all your cottages?"

"Every one," says I, "and business was fair, but nothing to brag of."

We drove down the shore road and hitched our horse. Then we cut across to the lighthouse. Before we went out to the island we kind of slunk along in the bushes to make sure nobody was watching for Mr. Pawky, but we didn't see a soul. We couldn't even see Mr. Pawky. When we were sure it was safe we skipped across the rocks and ran up to the lighthouse.

"Hey, Mr. Pawky," says Catty, cautious-like.

"Who calls?" says he, from up above.

"Us," says Catty, which wasn't exactly clear, but Mr. Pawky seemed to get the idea, for we heard him sort of fumbling around, and then he said in a complaining voice, "Well, why don't you come up? Why do you stand down there waiting? Come up. Come up."

"He's peevish," whispered Catty. "Most likely he's hungry."

We climbed the rickety stairs to the second floor and then to the third floor. Mr. Pawky was lying flat on his back on the blankets, scowling at the ceiling.

"H'm," says Catty, "haven't you got up yet?"

"I'm thinking," says Mr. Pawky. "I always reason better when I lie down."

"Bet he's inventing something," says I.

"Right," says he. "I was. I was striving to invent some device which would inform me when food was cooked. If a lamb chop would only ring a bell when it's done, instead of burning up, it would be very much better than the way it is."

"Did you burn your chops?"

"To a cinder."

"Don't see how you could do it," says Catty. "Didn't you watch them?"

"Watch them! Of course not. I lighted the so-called stove and put the chops in a receptacle. Having no idea how much time they would consume in cooking, and rather fancying it would be several hours, I came up here to work out a simple problem upon which I was engaged. When I went down two hours later very little indeed was left of the chops. They were quite," he paused and scowled at me as if it was my fault, "quite inedible."

"No!" says Catty. "And have you had anything else to eat?"

"Some fruit out of a can and some cookies. They were not sufficiently filling."

"Well," says I, "you'd better come down now while Catty and I make you some coffee and fry you a couple of eggs. Then you can see how it's done."

But just then I looked out of the window, and there, rowing his boat up to the island as if he was going to get out and explore, was the Toop kid—the one we saw in the automobile.

"Look," says I, "there's young Toop."

"Who?" says Mr. Pawky in a kind of a squawk.

"The Toop kid," says I.

"Then," says Mr. Pawky, "all is lost. He knows me. He will tell his parent."

"Not," says Catty, "if I know myself. You sit tight right up here and watch me dispose of Toopie."

With that he went hotfoot down the stairs, and I was right at his heels. If anybody was going to singe that Toop kid's pinfeathers, I wanted to be in on it. He made the hair on the back of my neck prickle.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WHEN we got down to the ground the Toop kid was just pulling his boat up on the beach. We saw right off it was the same boat we sold to the man the other day, and we guessed it must have been Mr. Toop himself. That made us feel pretty good. We'd got the best of a millionaire, and if we could do that, why, there was no reason why we shouldn't be millionaires ourselves if we kept at it.

"Hey," says Catty, "where you going?"

"Going fishing for suckers," says the Toop kid.

"Um. . . ." says Catty, "you don't know much about this part of the lake, do you? Haven't been around here long?"

"Long enough to take care of myself."

"Maybe so," says Catty. "Then you know a crazy man built this thing."

"What's that?"

"Crazy as a loon. Dangerous."

"Then what are you doing here?" says he.

We weren't going to tell him the crazy man hadn't been alive for a dozen years, so all Catty

said was, "We happen to know how to keep out of his way. He's chased more than one man off of this island with an ax." And that was true, too. Catty turned to me. "You're keeping a fine watch, Wee-wee. Get over there and hide in the bushes, and keep your eye peeled."

"I knew he had some kind of a scheme he didn't have time to tell me, and that I would have to catch on to, so I hopped across and hid where I could watch him and hear most he said.

"You can always tell if the crazy man's coming," Catty says, because he never moves around without whistling all the time, loud as anything, and sometimes he'd stop whistling to screech like he was being pulled to pieces."

"Aw, go on," says Toop, "you're trying to string me. I'm going up to look at that lighthouse, and you can't stop me. You don't own this lake. My father owns more of it than anybody else. I guess I can do about as I want to around here."

"No skin off my nose," says Catty. "You can scratch the looney on the back if you want to. . . . Listen," he says, all of a sudden.

I caught on, and whistled, and kept it up, getting louder and louder, until I thought it was about time for a holler. Well, sir, I let out a

shriek you could have heard a mile. It was enough to curl the hair on the back of your neck.

"What's that?" says Toop, kind of backing off.

"What do you think it is?" says Catty. "A mouse."

At that I let out another yowl, and you should have seen Toop go away from there. He jumped into his boat and started thrashing the water with the oars till it got foamy. I never saw anybody row quite so frantic in my life. And he kept it up. I guess he thought our crazy man was going to swim out and catch him.

"That was easy enough," says Catty, "but he's going to find out the crazy man's been dead for years, and then he'll come back to find out why we played a trick on him."

"I don't know," says I. "Once a fellow gets scared of a place, he always feels creepy about it. Maybe he knows there isn't anything there to hurt him, but he can't get rid of the idea he'd rather be some place else."

"Maybe so," says Catty. "I hope so, anyhow. Let's go up and see Harbottle."

So we climbed the lighthouse again, and this time we found Harbottle on the floor with a

lot of riggings around him—electric-looking things, and he was fussing with them and petting them and acting like they were his favorite kitten.

"What's all that?" says I.

"Radio outfit," says he. "A first-class one—one of the very best."

"Got your patent dingus on it?" says I.

"It has," says he, "but you can't see it."

"Why?"

"Because," he says with a kind of a sly smile, "I've got it out of sight."

"What are you going to do with the thing?" says I.

"Rig it up," he says. "I'm lonesome here. When I put this up I'll have company all the time, and besides, I can carry on my experiments.

"Have to have wires strung up outside, don't you?" Catty asked

"Yes, but I can conceal them so nobody will see them. That is the easiest part of it. I'll do that to-night after dark."

"And you can hear things from Washington and Chicago and Pittsburgh over that?"

"It's a powerful instrument. I can hear a very great distance. When I have it installed you may listen. You can hear music and lec-

tures and opera—anything you want. And there will be no interference by static. This," says he, "is the only radio outfit in the world with which static cannot interfere."

"Fine," says I. "When do we hear the first entertainment?"

"I'll be ready to-morrow night, if you care to come."

"And if Mr. Toop doesn't find you. And if you don't starve to death."

He stopped tinkering and looked from one to the other of us for a minute. I do believe he had forgotten all about being a fugitive and how he was hiding there. He'd gotten so interested in his electrical doodads that you could have shot a gun under his nose and he wouldn't have heard it.

"True," says he. "By the way, how did you dispose of the intruder—the boy you said was coming?"

"Scared him off," said Catty.

"I wish," said Harbottle, "that you would scare off his father, too."

"That wouldn't be so easy," says Catty. "Well, we'll feed you up and be on our way back. Got lots of work to do. We'll come out to-morrow sometime. You keep out of sight."

"I shall. I shall be occupied with my work.

I doubt if I step outside this building during the day."

"That's best," says Catty. "Good-by."

"Have her fixed up so we can hear a lecture to-morrow," says I.

"I shall," says he. "Good afternoon."

We went back and got our wagon and drove off toward home. It was just at the edge of town that we met a man, and it kind of startled me, because it was one of the two men who were chasing Harbottle Pawky the first time we saw him. I nudged Catty.

"Harbottle isn't safe yet," says I.

"You bet he isn't," says Catty. "They'll never give up trying to grab that invention of his."

"What'll he do?" says I.

"That's more than I can say. That man wants to talk to us. . . . Whoa."

We drew up and the man came and leaned his elbow on the wheel. "Seen a funny-looking little man with big glasses and a box under his arm?" he asked.

"Name of Jones?" says Catty.

"No, name of Harbottle Pawky," says the man.

"Funny name," says Catty.

The man looked at us a minute. "Say," he

says, "aren't you the boys we met the other day—the ones who said they saw our man in the bank?"

"Didn't say anything about your man," says Catty. "We told you we saw a man in the bank with big tortoise-rimmed glasses. We did."

"Huh," says the man. "He wasn't the one. But we know our man got off the train here, and we're sure he took this road out of town. I've traced him half-way to the lake. Kind of a joke on him, at that," he says and grinned. "Say, if you see anything of him—the man with the specs—tell me and there's five dollars in it."

"Where will I find you?" says Catty.

"Either at the hotel or out at Mr. Toop's house. You know Mr. Toop at the lake."

"Know where he lives," says Catty.

"Don't forget. Five dollars if you see my man."

"You must want to find him badly," says Catty.

"I do," says the man, and he went off up the road looking pretty anxious. I guess Mr. Toop wasn't pleased with him for losing sight of Harbottle, and Mr. Toop looked like a man who could be pretty mean if something happened he didn't like.

"Anyhow," says Catty to me, "we know they're still hanging around looking for Pawky. That 'll make us more careful."

"I hope it doesn't get us into any trouble. I don't like trouble. There's something about trouble that fairly makes me sick. No, sir. There may be folks that like danger and adventure, but I'm not one. What I want is just to have everything run along smooth all the time."

"Fiddlesticks," says Catty. "I'll bet we get a good exciting adventure out of this yet."

"I hope you lose your bet," says I. "Being a financier is exciting enough for me."

"All right," says he, "let's be financiers the rest of the day. We haven't made enough money to wad a gun with."

"Fine," I says, "you think up how to do it, and I'll take care of the rough work, like carrying the money to the bank."

We made the old nag mog along as fast as he would go, which wasn't very fast, and Catty says, "Suppose we were pursued by wolves now."

"Guess the wolves wouldn't get tired out chasing us," says I. "If I was a wolf I'd be ashamed to run after this horse. I'd turn around and back after him."

"Huh," says Catty, "you haven't any imagination."

"No," says I, "not enough to make me think we're going more than two miles an hour. Try something easier."

That ended that. Catty would have had me all lathered up with excitement if he could, but he couldn't. Not that time. If I hadn't sat on it then and there, he'd have had wolves all around us, and more than likely he'd have thrown me out to feed them while he escaped. But we had plenty of excitement without imagining wolves, for just as we got to the edge of town we heard the fire whistle on the waterworks hollering for all it was worth.

We don't have enough fires in our town so that they get to be common. "Let's tie the horse to a tree and run," says I, "We can get there twice as fast." That's how much I thought of our nag. But Catty wouldn't. He said it would be undignified for financiers. I knew there would be some kind of drawback to being those things.

But we got there almost in time. The hose cart was just pulling up to Bartlett's hardware store when we turned the corner. It was kind of late, on account of the fire chief having to hunt up his helmet. I heard him tell Newt

Bunker one of his kids had it full of water and was keeping pollywogs in it.

It wasn't much of a fire, mostly smoke, but the firemen got in their best licks just the same. They squirted the store full of water and chopped holes in the roof and busted the windows and cut up pretty rough all around. And they didn't want to quit when Bartlett came tearing around and said it was out and that they did more damage than seven fires. They were going to keep right on squirting their hoses until Bartlett went and got his double-barreled shotgun and said if they didn't vamoose he'd fill them full of bird shot. Then they got out, but they were pretty mad. The chief said the next time Bartlett had a fire he could put it out himself, and Bartlett hollered back that he'd rather trust a fire in his store any day than that fire company. So everybody was happy and having a good time.

Folks gathered around Bartlett and asked him what his loss was and how much insurance he had, and he said he didn't have any insurance because who in tunket would expect a hardware store to burn, and he didn't guess his loss would be any more than he'd have spent for insurance policies all these years.

Catty and I got around behind and went

through the back door to see for ourselves how much damage had been done. We examined things pretty careful. Showcases were busted and everything was sopping wet. Nail kegs were half full of water and the whole outfit looked like Noah must have found things on earth after he landed out of the ark. There was one show case all full of jackknives and fishing reels and compasses and flash lights and what not. Everything looked to me like it was ruined. By morning it would be so rusty nothing would be worth a cent—that's how it looked to me.

Catty stood and stared around, and then he says to me, "Wee-wee, there ought to be some way for us to make money out of this."

"How?" says I.

"Wait till morning," says he, "things 'll look worse then."

"All right," I says, "I've had enough financiering for one day, anyhow."

CHAPTER EIGHT

NEXT morning Catty was around bright and early. He got me out almost before I had time to eat breakfast.

"Come on," says he, "we've got to make a deal. Hope Mr. Bartlett's feeling kind of mad to-day."

"Why?"

"Because," says he, "we can strike a better bargain. You can always get the best of a man when he's mad."

Well, Bartlett was mad. When we got to the store, he was standing in the middle of it mentioning his opinion of the fire company, and of the weather, and of business in general, and then he branched off on to the Democratic party and the tariff and said a few neat things about England and prohibition and farming, and then he wound up by whaling into the Bolsheviki. Catty waited for him to finish, and then he says:

"Mr. Bartlett, what are you going to with what's left of your stock."

"If 'twan't fer gittin' arrested," says Bart-

lett, "I'd stack dynamite under it and touch her off. . . . What be I goin' to do with it? What d'ye think I be? Eat it? Hain't nothin' to do but sell it fer what it'll fetch."

"Thought maybe you'd do that. Say, those knives look about ruined."

"They be," says Bartlett, "Rust 'll be eatin' into 'em like a mouse into cheese. And them other things! Gee-whillikins, but the whole kit and bilin' hain't wuth enough to buy a day's feed fer a muskeeter."

"That's my idea," says Catty.

"Who in tunket asked you to have an idea?" says Mr. Bartlett.

"What'll you take for that case full of junk, as it stands, lock, stock, and barrel? All of it."

"What you want to know fer?"

"Might buy it if it was cheap enough," says Catty.

"Huh. You git out of here 'fore I lose my temper."

"Give you twenty-five dollars," says Catty, and waved the money at him.

"You git out. Git out now, whilst ye kin walk out."

"Give you thirty," says Catty.

Mr. Bartlett turned and made a kind of

"WHAT 'LL YOU TAKE FOR THAT CASEFUL OF JUNK, AS IT STANDS, LOCK, STOCK, AND BARREL? ALL OF IT!"

pounce toward us and shook his fist. "Sell it to ye for fifty dollars," he bellowed. "Fifty. Now shet up and git out."

"Here's your fifty," says Catty.

Well Mr. Bartlett turned kind of yaller and goggled and opened his mouth and shut it like a goldfish.

"Here's your fifty," says Catty.

"Say, I hain't no idea what's in that case."

"It doesn't matter now," says Catty, "you've sold it to us."

He pushed the money into Bartlett's hand, and walked over to the case. "You stay here," says he, "and begin packing the stuff so we can carry it. I'll go get the rig."

Bartlett he stood kind of speechless till Catty was out of the door. Then he rushed at me. "Hey, you, git away from there. Leave them things alone."

"They belong to us," says I, my mad kind of rising. "You made your proposition. Fifty dollars was what you said, and we paid the money, and you've got it in your hand. Maybe we're cheated, for all I know. But the deal's made. You can't crawl out of it any more than we can. Anyhow, this stuff is paid for and it's ours."

He stopped and scowled.

"Want me to go out and tell folks how you backed out of a bargain?" says I.

Well, that finished him, because he was always bragging around that his word was as good as his bond, and that when he said a thing he stood by it.

Catty came back in twenty minutes with the horse and wagon, and two men. We carried out the case and piled it on the wagon and drove it down to our office—the one that used to be the cobbler's shop. There we unloaded it and the men lugged it inside.

"Now," says Catty, "we'll take stock."

We did. It was quite a job. Here's a list of what we had bought:

58 jackknives in a cloth case
6 hunting knives
3 fish knives
9 reels
3 steel fishrods
2 compasses
2 camp axes
7 flash lights
1 tray of assorted fishhooks
1 tray assorted sinkers
11 artificial baits
18 jackknives in boxes
2 boxes fishlines

1 pedometer
2 collapsible drinking cups
1 showcase with top glass cracked.

"There," says I, "that's what we've got. Now what in tunket are we going to do with it?"

"Sell it," says Catty.

"How?" says I.

"First," says he, "we'll have to doctor it up a little."

"Quite a lot more than a little," says I. "It looks now, most of it, as if the cat had dragged it in."

It did, too. All the nickel was smoked and rusted up and messy-looking. The pasteboard boxes with things in them were a regular pulp. If I'd been passing and seen the whole outfit, I don't believe I'd have given a nickel for it. But Catty was all excited. He said we'd made they buy of our lives, and that we were going to make a killing, as he called it.

We got to work with rags and kerosene oil and polish and worked like tunket, and it would surprise you the difference it made. It was a lot of nuisance rubbing and shining, but you wouldn't believe how little real damage there was. Why, the nickel-plated flash lights looked even better than new. The hunting knives

weren't hurt at all, except the leather cases were stained. The fishlines were wet, but what good is a fishline if it hurts it to get wet? That's what they're for. We had to take the reels all to pieces and oil them and tinker them—and they were as good as new. Why, honest to goodness, about five hours' work fixed every single thing so you could hardly tell it had ever been in a fire.

"But," says I, "how are you going to sell them?"

"You watch," says he. "You're a pretty good fist at printing, aren't you?"

"So folks say when they want to be nice," I says.

"Well, you get a couple of pieces of white cloth about five feet by three and some black paint and a brush," he says. "You can buy the cloth, but you can borrow the paint and brush out at Dad's mill."

I scurried off to get them, and when I came back he had Dick Plass, the odd-job man, putting a new plate of glass in the showcase. He'd got some black cloth and was lining the case inside, and rubbing it up with varnish, so that a body would have thought it just came from the factory.

"Ready?" says Catty.

"Shoot," says I.

"Paint two signs," he says. "Let's see—what had we better have on 'em? Um. . . . I've got it. We can get Mose White to play his banjo and sing for a dollar. He'll be tickled to death."

"What's he got to do with it?"

"He's to get the crowd together," says Catty. "You can't sell things to folks unless you get folks to sell things to."

"That sounds like sense," says I.

"Then print your signs to read, "Free show. Eight o'clock sharp. In the square."

"That all?"

"Yes."

"Nothing about bargains?"

"Not a word."

"Don't see any sense in it," says I.

"Wait and see," he says. "You paint and I'll do the thinking."

"If you think as well as I paint," I says, "we'll do pretty well."

It didn't take me half an hour to fix up the signs. Then we tied them on our horse, one on each side of him. We had to make a trip to the lake with supplies to the cottages, and off we went after we locked our office, with the signs hung out. As we went up the street you could

see folks staring at us, and a lot hollered after us to know what was going to happen. But Catty told me not to answer any questions.

"Get 'em all worked up with curiosity," says he.

We made our calls and stopped a second to see Harbottle Pawky, who seemed to be all right and comfortable. It looked like he didn't need to eat so long as he could tinker with his radio fixings. On the road we met the Toop boy in his automobile. He looked us over and stopped his car and says, "Hey, what you rubes up to now?"

"We're planning to skin some of you city greenhorns," says Catty. "Come in to-night and fetch your skin with you."

"Don't get fresh with me," says Toop.

"If I had time," says Catty, "I'd love to sit and talk back and forth with you. It amuses Wee-wee, and he's hard to amuse. He laughs fit to split every time he sees you."

"For two cents," says Toop, "I'd get down and crack you in the eye."

"It 'ud be worth it," says Catty, "but I'm busy to-day. I'm figuring on giving you a good licking before the summer's over, though. Bear it in mind. It'll give you something to think about besides how important you are. Say, you

are kind of important, aren't you? A body can tell it just to look at you."

"I'm important enough to get you into a lot of trouble if you go monkeying around me," says Toop.

"Your pa's rich, isn't he?"

"Richer than anybody in this jerkwater town."

"You'd think, then," says Catty, kind of quiet, "that he could have afforded to have you taught manners, then."

He clucked to our horse and we went away, leaving young Toop to think up some answer to that. He hadn't thought one up when we turned the next corner.

We got back into town and drove up and down the streets for a couple of hours, so everybody would be sure to see the signs, and I guess everybody did. Then we got hold of Mose White and made a bargain with him to be on hand at eight o'clock sharp with his banjo.

"How are you going to sell anything?" says I.

"Out of the wagon," says Catty.

"No light," says I.

"We'll hang a lot of Chinese lanterns," he says. "You've got some at your house from that ice cream sociable the Ladies' Aid had on your lawn."

"Fine," says I. "We can be rigging them on the wagon."

Well, we fixed up a framework to hang them on, and some boards for counters, and a place for Mose to sit and play and sing.

"The kids 'll guy the life out of us," says I.

"Let them," says Catty. "All they'll get out of it will be fun; you and I'll be making money."

That was a pretty sensible way to look at it, I thought, so I didn't say any more. But I was wondering just how Catty was going to manage his sale. As it turned out I pretty nearly never found out, and there pretty nearly wasn't any sale, and Catty and I almost got into about the excitingest mess of our bright young lives. Oh, that was some hour from seven till eight. It was some hour. You can have the next one that comes along like it, for I don't want it.

CHAPTER NINE

AS I say, we were on our way back to pull off Catty's sale when we met the Toop kid and sassed back and forth with him. Then we drove on maybe a quarter of a mile, talking about what was going to happen in town tonight, and me trying to prove to Catty that we'd have to eat our jackknives to get rid of them. We were just on top of Hay Hill when all of a sudden Catty hollered "Whoa" at the horse and stopped.

"What ails you?" says I, "see a snake?"

"Saw something," says he, "watch the old sporting camp."

The old sporting camp was a kind of log shack that some hunters built five or six years back and then never came back to. Nobody used it, and I never saw anybody around it except folks who passed kind of usual. You could see a corner of it sticking out of the underbrush from the top of the hill, and I looked as Catty told me to. At first I didn't see anything, but then I did see somebody come to the door and throw something out.

"Somebody's there," says I.

"Sure," says he, "and living there right along."

"How do you know?" says I.

"Huh," he says, "what did that fellow throw out of the door?"

"How should I know?" says I.

"Use your head," says he. "Notice the motion. It was dishwater. You never saw anybody come to a door and throw out anything with that kind of a scooping motion when it wasn't dishwater."

"That's right," says I.

"And that means," says he, "that they're living there."

"Looks that way."

"Got to be that way. They had to cook to eat. Had to heat water to wash dishes. If they'd just stopped for lunch they wouldn't have done either. No, sir, somebody's grabbed the old camp, and they're living there."

"What of it?" says I.

"Well," says he, "being mixed up like we are with Harbottle Pawky, it's our business to investigate everything suspicious that we see. Isn't it? Can't tell what might be happening. It doesn't do any harm to investigate fifty suspicious things that turn out to be nothing at all,

but it does do a lot of damage to neglect to look into one suspicious thing that turns out to be dangerous. Common sense, isn't it?"

"Maybe," says I, "but it's a good way to get our heads knocked together."

"For anybody with the kind of head you've got," says he, "you do a mighty lot of worrying about it. You sit here and keep your head safe while I go see."

"No," says I, "I'll go along. I know we ought not to, but if you're bound and determined I'll mog along. You always get into trouble and it takes a good, steady person like me to haul you out again."

"Huh," says he, "come along then—for any reason you want to, but be quick about it."

We tied our horse, though he didn't need it specially. But it was a kind of compliment to him to fasten him like he was a regular horse, so we did it. It might have hurt his feelings if we'd just let him stand, though the only way he'd have shown he was hurt would be to go slower than ever. We tied him and called his attention to it, but he didn't say thank you. I guess he was asleep before we got the halter fastened. Then we ducked off the road and headed for the camp.

The house was just a log shack about

eighteen by twelve with a door in the front end and a window on each of the other sides. It was set right in the thick of the woods, with a path leading up from the spring, and witch hopple growing close all around except in front. Catty and I sneaked down through the thick of it, and as he went ahead I got the worst of it. The second fellow going through that kind of stuff always does. The man ahead pushes aside branches and then lets them go just in time to snap the behind fellow on the nose. Just like snapping him with a whip. I mentioned it, but Catty said he did it to keep me awake. It took us five minutes to get close to the camp, and then we got pretty cautious and crawled.

Regular Indian stuff! Catty had forgotten all about his sale by this time, and I was so scairt I forgot it, too. But there we were, getting closer every minute, and the minute after that we shoved our noses right against the logs of the shack. Catty reared up and peeked through the window. Then he sat down sudden and grabbed me by the arm.

"For cat's sake, look!" says he.

Being curious is worse than being afraid, so I got up and took me a look. Well, I was considerably surprised, for there was Mr. Toop as big as life and three times as natural. And

there were two men with him. One of them was the biggest of the men we had seen chasing Harbottle Pawky. It kind of took my breath away to see a big millionaire like Toop hiding in that shanty with those men. I stood there and stared and listened, and Catty got up and listened, too. It was a good thing we did, for we found out more than we ever could have found out from Harbottle himself.

"I tell you," says Mr. Toop, "the man is in this neighborhood. He got off the train in town here, and walked out toward the lake. He hasn't been seen in any town within twenty miles of here in any direction. He's hiding, and I believe he's hiding some place close to here."

"You must be mistaken, Mr. Toop," says the big man. "You know Pawky as well as I do, and he couldn't live alone in the woods a day. He's the most helpless human being I ever encountered."

"Then," says Mr. Toop. "he's got help. Somebody is hiding him. Maybe he's told some cock-and-bull story and got a wooden-headed rube to hide him in his attic."

"I don't believe it. He passed this way, all right, but he was going away fast. We were right behind him, and all we saw was a couple of boys."

"You didn't tell me that," says Mr. Toop.

"I didn't think it was important," says the man.

"Everything is important," says Mr. Toop, "in a case like this, where hundreds of thousands of dollars are at stake."

That made me whistle to myself. Old Harbottle and his invention were pretty valuable, according to Mr. Toop's tale, and he ought to know.

"Did you question the boys?" he asked.

"Yes, but they didn't know anything."

"H'm, what boys were they? Have you seen them since?"

"Often. They drive an old horse out to the lake about every day."

"Um. . . . Those boys. Um. . . . Pretty sharp kids, those. Sure you questioned them sharply?"

"The best I could."

"Well, from what I learn, they got a little the best of me in a business deal," he said and kind of chuckled, "and a kid that can do that to me is quite considerable of a kid. If those are the youngsters, they'll bear watching. I've a feeling they're mixed up in this. I had the second you told me who they were. Yes, sir, if we keep our eyes on those boys without letting them

know it, we'll come to Harbottle Pawky if he's hidden in this part of the country. You see to it without fail. Don't let those boys get out of sight of some of our men for a minute."

I looked at Catty and Catty looked at me. That was a pretty note. Here we were to be spied on every second. We wouldn't be able to do a thing, and every fellow has things he wants to do without some grown man watching, and you can bet on it. But there was Pawky on our hands. If we were watched, how could we get to see him and take him food? And if we didn't he'd starve. It was a pretty pickle.

"Wherever Pawky is," says Toop, "his perfected receiving instrument is with him. He wouldn't trust it to a safety deposit vault. He hasn't much sense in a business way, but he does know enough to hang tight to that invention."

"How did he get it away from you when you had him and it tight?"

"I don't know. I'd have bought the whole caboodle for a couple of thousand, and it would have been worth a million to me in a year. I don't believe he cares much for money. All he is interested in is tinkering with wireless. But he's all heated up over anything he does. Gets sort of in love with it, I guess. Just when I

thought I had him—he was locked in a room with his box—he got suspicious or jealous or something, and out of a window he got and down the fire escape. We discovered it within ten minutes and were after him, but that's the last we've seen of him."

"Funny thing he should have run right up here where you are," says the man.

"It was kind of funny. He ran into the station and says to the ticket agent, 'Sir, I want to get on the first train.' 'For where?' says the ticket agent. 'It doesn't matter in the least,' says Pawky, 'so long as it goes away from here rapidly.' . . . Well, the train north was the first one out and he got on it. What induced him to get off here I can't imagine, unless it was our luck."

"We haven't had much luck since he did get off."

"Might have had," says Mr. Toop, "if you'd told me about those boys the way you should have. But we'll remedy that now. Get a man on them to-night, and never let them out of sight a minute."

"That's that," says the big man.

Well, I had kind of stuck my toes between two logs to look in and listen better, and the bark on that log picked out just that second to peel

and let me slip. My nose went kerspang against the window and like to busted the glass. In a jerk those three men were on their feet, startled, but motionless. It was lucky they didn't move —and it was lucky Catty knew that camp as well as he did. He and I had been past there more than once, and stopped, too.

My chin had hardly hit the glass then Catty was gone.

"Quick," says he, "the door!"

I got what he meant in a second. That's what it is to be used to working with a person so well you know what he's thinking about almost as soon as he begins to think it. I've got to know how Catty's mind works. I remembered that door and how it was made. There were two doors, one that opened inward, like most doors do, and a second door, a sort of winter door that was used just when the camp was left. This one opened outward. It was a plank door, and there was a bar that let down and then padlocked so folks prowling around couldn't break into the camp when the hunters were away. It was a good idea. I've approved of it ever since that evening.

Well, Catty got to that door before the men inside had made up their minds they really ought to do something. He banged it shut, and

I was right at his side. The second he banged it, I slammed the bar into the slots, and we had them tight—for a minute.

But the thing was rotten and a couple of heaves would let them out. I was for legging it toward the horse, but, as Catty explained later, that would have been a rotten idea. They would have seen who it was, recognized our horse, and the fat would have been in the fire. No, Catty thought quicker than I did.

"The loft," says he. "I saw the window was busted in."

The loft was in the peak of the shanty. It was just boards laid on the roof braces, and there was a window up in the angle for ventilation, I guess. Catty made for the back of the shack where the window was, and I after him.

The men were making a thundering racket trying to knock the door off the hinges, so they weren't likely to hear us, and the chinking was out from between the logs so we could climb it like we were squirrels. Up we went and into that loft we ducked, and not a minute too soon, for about the time we went in, they went out. One of them ran around each side of the house—but we weren't there to see. It was kind of funny, our being inside while they were outside.

Sort of joke on them, and the way it looked to me, we were in about the safest place we could be. They'd never think of looking up there for us. Who would suspect that anybody trying to get away from them would crawl right into the shanty?

So Catty and I crouched there maybe ten minutes while they rampaged around the woods. Then they came back.

"Maybe it was some animal," says Mr. Toop.

"There weren't any clear tracks," says the big man, "but what there were looked human."

"But who could have been spying on us? Why would anybody have spied on us?"

"Might have been Harbottle Pawky himself," says the man. "If he's hiding around, maybe he's watching you."

"Um. . . ." says Mr. Toop kind of thoughtful, "more likely it was those kids. If they know about him, and are helping him to hide, it would be just like them to make a sort of game out of spying on us. . . . By Jove, if I thought so!" His face got pretty mean and disagreeable, and I had a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach. Right off I began to wish I was some place else. I wanted to go and sell jackknives, but there was a fine chance! We didn't dare take a good deep breath.

CHAPTER TEN

I LOOKED at my watch and showed it to Catty. He scowled, and I says to myself, "This is a night when there won't be any sale," because we wanted to get it going by eight o'clock and it was after seven now. From the way it looked, those men were going to stay down there and talk for hours, and as long as they stayed we had to stay, too. There was nothing between us and them but some loose inch boards, and I was afraid to breathe.

"I tell you it was some human being," says Toop, "and if it was a human being he was spying, and if he was spying he had a reason for it. The only reason to spy on us would be Pawky. So it is safe to say he is somewhere around."

Mr. Toop could reason all right. Probably that's how he got to be a millionaire. I made up my mind I'd learn to reason things out, but then I sort of thought it over and got discouraged. You can't dig very well without a shovel. Then I felt better again, because it seemed to me that if a man with a head like Mr. Toop's could

make a million, a boy with a head like mine ought to make anyhow fifty thousand, and that would be plenty. I'd be satisfied with fifty thousand, anyhow.

It turned out we were going to have luck for once, for Mr. Toop says, "Well, men, I've got to go home. Both of you make for town and get track of those kids. If you get a chance, question them. Pin them down."

"Just as you say," says the big man, and Mr. Toop got up and went to the door. Then I thought of our horse and wagon, right out in the road. When those men went to town they would be sure to go down the road right past it, and then they'd know for sure we had been the ones who spied on them in the camp. I didn't like the idea of that at all, but it couldn't be helped. As long as we stayed where we were there wasn't much danger of our being found, unless we went to sleep and snored.

In another minute the three of them were outside. We waited a bit, and then we climbed down ourselves. There was just one chance of our getting to the horse and out of the way before they reached the road, and that was that they walked slow along the path and talked, while we cut straight across through the underbrush. We took a chance on it, and luck was

with us again. We got to the horse and piled in the wagon before they came out of the woods.

It was quite a job of getting old Maude S. started, but we stirred him up and poked him in the ribs until he woke up and kind of limped along like he was mad at the world. Of course his name wasn't Maude S. I just call him that on account of his speed. Maude S. was a race horse a good many years ago, that I've heard Dad talk about.

We kited for town as fast as we could manage and made right for my house. There we finished decorating the wagon and then we drove over and got Mose White and his banjo. Then we lighted our Chinese lanterns and started out for the square to do business. We had loaded in all our knives and other stock, so that when we got to the square we were ready to do business. There we stopped, and Catty says to Mose, "Now, Mose, whang the music box and give 'em a song."

Mose started to dingle the banjo and he let loose a song at the same time. People began to stop and stare at the wagon, and then they stayed to listen to Mose. By the time his first song was over there were maybe twenty folks there. By the time he finished the second there were fifty, and by the time he got through with

the third there were a hundred. Then Catty got up and make a kind of a bow and says,

"Ladies and gentlemen. This is a free entertainment. It doesn't cost you a cent. We aren't even going to take up a collection. You can stay as long as you like and listen all you like, and we hope you have a good time." He stopped and took a jackknife out of his pocket and began to whittle. It was a good knife and the way he made the shavings fly was a caution. "There's nothing like a good knife," says he. "Nothing in the world so useful. The trouble with good knives, though, is that they cost too much. Why, a knife like this one will cost anybody two dollars and a half. It's a regular two-dollar-and-a-half knife." He stopped and looked down at old Mister Pringle. "Want to look at it?" he asked.

Mr. Pringle wanted to look. He took it in his hand and turned it over and over, and other folks crowded around as if they never saw a jackknife in their lives before. He opened the blades and tried the edge on his thumb.

"Good knife," says he. "Calc'late it's wuth two-fifty."

"Every cent of it," says Catty. "That's the regular retail price. Now, Mr. Pringle, if you

could buy a knife like that for a dollar, what would you think?"

"I'd think it was a bargain," says Mr. Pringle.

"You'd kind of feel as if you were taking advantage of me if you bought that knife from me for a dollar, wouldn't you—you being a grown man and me a boy?"

"I calc'late I'd kind of feel *so,*" says Mr. Pringle.

"But it always feels good to get the best of anybody in a trade. It does to me. What'll you offer me for that knife?"

"Dollar," says Mr. Pringle, and the crowd laughed.

"It's your knife," says Catty, "pass up the money."

Then the crowd laughed the other way, but Mr. Pringle took a dollar bill out of his pocket and handed it up.

"Now," says Catty, "I've got a few more knives like that, some better, but all as good. Genuine two-and-a-half knives, and you folks can have them for a dollar a knife—while they last. Here—here's a tray of them. Look 'em over. Handle 'em. Open 'em up. Only a dollar apiece. Every knife you buy you make a dollar and a half."

Well, sir, you should have seen that crowd go for jackknives. "Get a flash light and flash it around," says Catty to me, so I did. He took in dollars for knives while I lighted up the place with a flash light in each hand. In five minutes the whole bottom of the wagon was covered with dollar bills and our fifty-eight jackknives were gone.

"Sing a song, Mose," says Catty, and Mose bellowed out another one of those funny songs he knows. When he was done Catty took a flash light and held it up. "Nickel plated," he says. "Brand new. Say, Jim Street, how much did you pay for that flash light you bought the other day?"

"Three-fifty," says Jim.

"Look at this one," says Catty, "and see if it isn't exactly the same as yours."

Jim looked and everybody waited to see what he would say. He turned it over and squinted at the trade mark and flashed it off and on.

"The identical same thing," says he.

"Then this light's worth three-fifty?" says Catty.

"Yes."

"If I was to offer you this one for a dollar and a half, what would you say?"

"I'd say you was foolish," says Jim.

"Well," says Catty, "this is my foolish night. Who wants that flashlight for a dollar and a half?"

"I do," yelled Tom Jennifer, and he almost grabbed it out of Jim's hand.

"Pass up the money," says Catty. "I've got five more at the same price. Same light exactly. Don't crowd. Just five."

Those five lights went so quick it was hard to see who took them.

"Any hunters here?" says Catty. "Sure there are. I see Jake Barnes. Know a fine hunting knife when you see it, don't you, Jake? Well, take a squint at this one." He passed down a knife to Jake, who examined it like it was a diamond he was going to buy for his best girl.

"Good knife," says he.

"What's it worth?" says Catty.

"Two-three dollars," says Jake.

"Now," says Catty, "as an expert—a hunter and a man who knows all about such things—what price would you think would be a big bargain for that knife? These folks all depend on your opinion, Jake, because they understand that you know."

"Wa-al," says Jake, "I 'd be mighty tickled

to git me a knife like this for a dollar and a half."

"Honest?"

"Sure."

"Will you give me a dollar and a half for this one?"

"Bet your life."

That was a deal, and Catty had got folks to feeling that Jake was such an expert and knew so well about things, that they took his word for it, and our six knives went in a couple of minutes.

"Now," says Catty, "while Mose gives us another song, I'd like to have you look at something extra special in the way of jackknives. I'm going to pass 'em out for you to look at, and then, because I know the kind of folks you are, and that you'll be fair about it, I'm going to let you appoint three men to set a price on them. How's that?"

Everybody laughed, but they sort of entered into the spirit of the thing, and when Mose was done Catty stood up and says, "Who's the committee?"

"I nominate Pete Williams," says somebody.

"And Rudy Brown."

"And Art Simmons."

"Will the committee meet here by the

wagon, and set a fair price on these extra fine knives in cases?" says Catty. "Don't make the price too high," he says, and everybody laughed at that.

The committee met as solemn as if they were directors of a bank and examined all of the eighteen knives. Then they argued, and finally Pete Williams says, 'Ladies and gentlemen, this committee has looked over the knives, and we feel that everybody will be getting a lot more than his money's worth if he gets one for a dollar and a quarter."

"There you are," says Catty. "Hear what your committee says. One dollar and twenty-five cents for the finest jackknife that ever came to town. Who wants the first one?"

About ten folks wanted the first one, and there were six that wanted the last one, too, so five of them got disappointed.

"Now, fishermen," says Catty, "I've got three fishknives and nine first-class, quadruple multiplying casting reels, and three jointed steel rods, with lines and sinkers and artificial baits. What I'm going to do is take a rod and a reel and a line—a first-class, braided casting line—and a casting bait. Then I'm going to auction the lot. About twenty dollars' worth of stuff, if I know anything about it. The reel

alone is worth five or six dollars. Here you are. How much for a complete fishing outfit? What's that? Two dollars? No, Jake, I'm not Santa Claus. . . . Three dollars—that's better. Three-fifty. Four. . . . Four-fifty. . . . Five. . . Five dollars bid. Five dollars. Who'll say six? Six. Nobody want this fishing outfit for six dollars? What's that? Five-fifty. . . . Five-fifty, once. Five-fifty, twice. . . . Going, going, gone to Bill Toomey at five-fifty. Step up and get the biggest bargain you ever got, Bill."

Bill took his stuff and everybody wanted to see it, and he showed it as proud as if he'd made it himself, instead of buying it at auction.

"Now," says Catty, "I've got two more outfits just like Bill's. Anybody want them at the same price?"

Two folks did, and that finished the rods and knives. But there were reels and hooks and sinkers left, and lines.

"I've got six more reels, just as good as those, and, just to get rid of them, I'm going to offer them for a dollar apiece. Just six. Step up, quick. Five-dollar reels for a dollar. You saw Bill's reel, didn't you? Well, here they are."

So six more dollar bills went on to the bottom of our wagon.

"Ever get lost in the woods?" says Catty. "It's a mean feeling. There's just one way to keep straight, and that's with a compass. We've got two very fine brass compasses. Fifty cents apiece. Only half a dollar. . . . You and you, eh? And who wants a pedometer? Wear it in your pants pocket and see how far you walk. Seventy-five cents. That's the boy. And now three collapsible drinking cups. Handiest thing in the world. Quarter apiece. Only a quarter. Nothing but bargains to-night. . . . And now here's a job lot. Everybody likes job lots. There are eight assorted casting baits worth a dollar apiece and a box of fine lines and a tray of hooks and another of sinkers. What am I offered for the lot? Easily twenty dollars' worth. For a quick sale I'll take five for the whole gaboodle. You again, Bill. Bill sure has a nose for a bargain. . . . And now, ladies and gentlemen, Mose will play and sing for you as long as you like. The sale is over. Whoop her up, Mose."

While Mose sang Catty and I counted up. We had what looked like a bushel of dollar bills, and when we came to get them all together and counted we found what the sale had brought us in. It came out to an even one hundred and thirty dollars.

"Finance," says Catty. "Got our fifty dollars back and eighty more to keep it company."

"Yes," says I, "and the showcase. We've still got that."

"Not bad," says Catty, "for one deal. A couple more like this and we'll be able to go in for something big."

"The bigger we go in," says I, "the more we lose."

"If we gain," says Catty, "it's because we used our heads and deserved it. If we lose, it's for the same reason."

"That," says I, "sounds logical."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

CATTY was pretty well satisfied with himself after the hardware proposition was over with. He said it was about as good a piece of financing as Mr. Rockefeller could do —to double his money and sixty per cent beside in just one deal. We were getting pretty rich by this time. There was what we had made on the rowboat, and what we made with our grocery route, and what we made with our pop-corn stand. It was getting past a hundred dollars, with a lot of fun thrown in. Then Catty got his lawn-mowing idea.

"We'll canvass the town," says he "and get the job of keeping all the lawns cut—all we can get. For so much a week."

"Don't see any finance in that," says I. "Looks like straight hard work."

"You don't get the idea," says he.

"I don't," says I, "but I'll get the backache."

"You'll never get headache," he says right back at me, and then he explained. "We'll get all the lawns we can, and see what it figures up to, and then we'll hire somebody else to do the

work. We'll pay 'em less than we get—and the profit will be ours."

"That sounds good," says I, "but who's going to do it? If a man can get a dollar for mowing a lawn for Mr. Jones, he isn't going to mow the same lawn for us for seventy-five cents."

"There's a difference," says Catty, "between doing work by the job and by the day. We take work by the job, and hire somebody to do it by the day. See?"

"No," says I, prompt and emphatic.

"How many lawns can a good man—say Mose White—mow in a day?"

"Depends on the lawns," says I.

That kind of had him for a minute, and I guess he didn't see any way out of it. But he wriggled out. You could see he was talking all around the bush while he thought about it, and figured out an argument. At last his face got kind of satisfied, and he says, "Oh, fiddle, Wee-wee. Come on. Let's see how many lawns we can get."

"All right," says I, just as if he'd won the argument, and off we went. We took our bikes and divided the town into sections. I took a street and he took a street, and we stopped at every house. I was surprised to find how many folks would like to have their lawns mowed

regularly every week. Catty told me how much to charge, and the way we got at it was to mow our lawn and see how long it took. Our lot is fifty by a hundred and twenty-five. It took the pair of us just half an hour to mow it and clip it and do a first-class job.

"Men," says he, "could do it quicker. But say half an hour. In this town we can hire Mose White and his brother-in-law for three dollars a day. That's eight hours. Counting going from one place to another, they won't mow more than a lawn an hour. Even small ones. We'll charge a dollar a lawn for small lawns, and more according for big ones. The labor 'll cost six dollars. We'll take in eight. That makes two dollars a day profit."

So that's how we went at it. We worked it systematic, and before the end of the week we had taken the contract to mow more than twenty lawns. Then, when other folks saw how well it worked out they came in, too, and before the summer was over we were taking care of just forty-two lawns, and some of them were big ones, like Mr. Bailey's, that took two men a whole day to mow and clip. Mose and his brother worked all day long, six days a week for us, and they worked, too, for Catty had a way of turning up to watch them when they

didn't expect it, and after he'd sailed into them a couple of times for loafing, they didn't try it any more. Besides that he went to Mandy, Mose's wife, and told her she had to help keep Mose at work, and she said it would be the first time in his life he ever worked steady, but if we'd provide him steady work, she'd see to it he was on hand every day, or else he wouldn't sleep in her house. So Mose worked. It turned out pretty well, and lasted until October.

After getting the contracts in the first place, we hardly had to turn our hands over, and when we came to figure the profit on the lawn deal, it came to about twelve dollars a week for something like fourteen weeks. Not bad, just to pick up and put in your pocket. But that's finance.

We kind of developed our office about this time. We had pop corn and candy and soft drinks for sale all the time, and on ball game days we moved out to the ball park. Then we put in a couple of tables and some chairs, and served ice cream. Of course, with all our different interests, we didn't have much time to spend in the office, so Catty suggested we hire Benny Briggs, who was a lame kid and couldn't get around much to work, and needed the money. He was our clerk, and took messages

and orders and things that came in for our other businesses. We paid him five dollars a week, and he earned it. You bet he did.

It was pretty slick to have a regular office like a grown-up financier, and a clerk in it. I felt pretty chesty, and Catty got about twice as big around the wishbone.

All this time Catty was looking for the Big Idea—the one that was really going to make us rich, but he hadn't got it yet. I began to think he never would, but I was satisfied as things were. He wasn't. He never was satisfied. If we made two dollars, he thought it should have been four. If we made eighty dollars, he said that just went to prove we could make eight hundred if we went at it.

"Yes," says I, "and if we make eight hundred that proves we can make eight thousand, and if we can make eight thousand, that proves we can make eighty thousand. Why, doggone it, at that rate we can sit here and prove we can make eighty billions, and nobody ever did that yet."

"There's always got to be a first time," says Catty as sober as a judge. Yes, sir, that's what he said, and he meant it. I'll bet he made up his mind right there to be the first man in the world who ever made eighty billion dollars. And

whatever he'd do with all of it I couldn't see. But I was his partner, and so forty billion would be mine. I didn't want forty billion and I told him so. "Forty million 's *plenty,*" says I, "any more would be a nuisance. You couldn't *spend* it. You'd have to hire folks to spend it for you, and that's silly. Any man that has to hire folks just to spend money is wasteful," says I. "That's what he is."

"Why," says Catty, "with eighty billion dollars we could go and buy a country. Not a big one, maybe, but a little one like Portugal. And when we bought it, every stick and stone of it, we could do as we wanted to. We could make ourselves kings of it."

"Kings!" says I. "Both of us. Uh-uh. Not two kings in one country. That always raises a rumpus. We'd be sicking our knights on one another, and throwing one another into dungeons. Nope. Just one king. We can draw cuts for it." By this time both of us had got so far we were about ready to pick out the country we were going to buy.

"No," says Catty, "you can be king."

"Eh?" says I. "What's the idea? What 'ud you be? I never saw you taking a back seat before."

"You go ahead," says he, "and be king.

You'd like it, and I don't think I would. Robes and a crown would be kind of hot in the summer. Nope, you be king, Wee-wee."

"All right," says I, "but what are you going to do? Be a crown prince?"

"Not by a jugful," says he. "I'm going to be prime minister—like Richelieu was. The prime minister just has a job, and the king gives him the job. But this Richelieu was such a brainy prime minister he got so he was boss of the king. He was the brains of the whole kingdom. That's what he was. He let the king keep on kinging and wearing the crown and doing the fancy things, but Richelieu, he kept sawing wood, and did the real work."

"Um. . . ." says I.

"Sure. If you wanted a favor of the king, did you go to the king for it? You did not. You went to Richelieu, and he told you whether the king would let you have it."

"What was the king doing all this time?" says I.

"He was satisfied," says Catty. "He didn't have to do anything but order in his court jester, and eat all he wanted, and wear robes and ride around for the populace to cheer. He had a slick job."

"Maybe so," says I, "but I guess we'd better

take turn about. I be king a week and you be prime minister. Then you be king and I be prime minister."

"Wouldn't work," says he. "There'd be different policies, and you've got to have the same policy all the time, or the kingdom goes to smash."

"Didn't know you insured kingdoms," says I.

"Insured kingdoms!" says he. "What you talking about?"

"Why, what you were," says I. "Policies. You said they had to have the same insurance policies all the while."

"Policies!" says he. "Not insurance policies. A policy means you set out with the idea of making war on somebody, and you stick to it until you're ready and know you can lick the other country, and then you lick it. That's policies. It was Richelieu's strong holt."

I kind of thought it over, but I didn't like it from any angle. "I'll tell you," says I, "when the time comes, we'll buy two little countries, and both of us 'll be prime ministers. Then there won't be any disagreement." And that's how we left it.

But all this hasn't anything to do with the Big Idea, for Catty got one, just like he always seems to get him an idea when he needs one,

and the Big Idea is more or less why this story came to be. That and Harbottle Pawky, and somehow the two of them seemed to be all mixed up. Not in the Idea exactly, but tied together. Because Mr. Toop was what Pawky had to contend with in his business, and Mr. Toop's son was what Catty and I ran up against when we came to working the Big Idea.

It seems as if there always had to be something. The Big Idea would have been fine and it would have run along as smooth as slippery ellum if it hadn't been for young Toop, but there he was as big as life and twice as natural. And when he got to work it ran as smooth as sandpaper with wrinkles in it. Even now that it is all over, I can't think of that Toop kid without getting into a cold sweat.

We were financiers, but we weren't so very financial. Not to speak of. Less than two hundred dollars was about how heavy we were with the finance; but young Toop! Ouch! All he had to do was run to his pa, who jingled with dollars, and ask for what he wanted. He had dollars where we had cents. But there was one thing he couldn't borrow from his dad, and that was what Catty had inside his head. Money is a bully thing, and it can kick up an awful row when you set it to work. But you

have to mix it with brains to get the best results. Now as for me, I'd rather mix a little money with lots of brains, and lots of money with little brains. The prescription turns out better.

The Toop kid was pretty smart, at that, but he was all complicated by a disposition, and he was spoiled, and thought he was a Northern spy, while the rest of us were nothing but crab apples. That was a bad notion. It's all right to think you are a pippin, but give the other fellow credit for being a russet anyhow. Don't underestimate him too much. No, sir. You always want to figure the other fellow runs about four to the hill, anyhow. Then if he only runs two to the hill you're that much better off. But if you start off by thinking he only runs two to the hill and he turns out to run six, why, you've got yourself in a dickens of a mess and maybe you've sprained your nose. I thought this out myself. It isn't Catty's smartness. Sometimes, when I'm all alone, and get to thinking about it, I get the idea that maybe I'm not so dumb after all. But, on the other hand, maybe I am.

Well, what with our various enterprises, and looking for the Big Idea, and worrying about Pawky, we were a pretty busy pair, especially

after those men of Toop's took to tagging us around in the hope we'd lead them to that static invention Mr. Toop was so anxious to get.

You'd better believe they followed us. Every time we lifted our eyes off of our feet, there was one of them. As soon as one of us left home, there was a man, and, I'll bet a cent, they peeked through a knot hole and watched us get into bed. Now, if you think it was easy to dodge and get food out to Pawky in such circumstances, why, you've got another guess. And we *had* to get him something to eat. If we didn't, he'd starve, and then somebody would find out about it, and maybe we'd have to go to jail. You never can tell. Law 's a funny thing.

It was Wednesday, and we just naturally had to get to see Pawky that day. We had to dodge Mr. Toop's spies. We did it, but it almost turned our hair pink. Yes, sir, that was about the dodgingest day we ever had, and I'll bet that spying fellow will remember it to his dying day. I have to laugh yet when I think about it, and yet I didn't laugh so awful much at the time. You can always laugh better after than during. Things are a lot funnier when their stinger has been pulled.

CHAPTER TWELVE

WE had one advantage over Toop's men, and that was that we knew they were watching us, and they didn't know we knew it. So we could plan, and that's what we sat down to do.

"No use talking," says Catty, "we've got to get out to see Pawky to-day."

"Sure," says I. "You hold the two men and tie 'em to a tree while I go."

"Um. . . ." says Catty.

"There's the big one now," says I, pointing across the street where the man was sort of lounging and keeping us under his eye.

"Wonder where the other one is," says Catty.

"Maybe he isn't on the job to-day."

"We'll find out," says he. "You go off up the street to the old ice house. I'll go the other way. Then we'll both circle and meet down by the waterworks. That way we can tell. The big one can't follow both of us."

"On your way," says I, and off we went. The big one followed Catty, but before I had got to the corner there was the other one kind

of slinking along behind me. Well, I gave him a fine chase and got his feet wet for him. I ducked down by the bayou and right across the swamp. I got in water to my knees, but I didn't care about that. I guess he thought I was getting into a pretty likely place to hide somebody, so he stuck to me, and when he came out at the other side he was black muck almost to his waist. That was some satisfaction.

Then I circled around and met Catty at the waterworks. This was early in the morning. When I came up with him Catty had that kind of satisfied expression on his face that he wears when he thinks he's thought of something smart, so I says, "Well, cough it up. What's it going to be?"

"I think," says he, "I've found a way to get to see Pawky."

"And take the horse and wagon?"

"Yes."

"Fine," says I. "How?"

"You just come along with me," says he, "and watch."

"We got to load our groceries and meat and other stuff for this trip," says I.

"Of course," says he.

So off we went and got our load on, and then we started out of the village toward the lake.

Behind us came the big one and the other one in a buggy, keeping just far enough behind so they thought we wouldn't suspect we were being followed. Well, we poked along until we got abreast of Sile Wiggins's early corn field, which was between the road and Sile's strawberry patch. Sile judged it was safer to have his strawberries back from the road. Not but what he watched them pretty careful wherever he was, and we fellows had found out it was a good place to let alone. Here Catty stopped, and the buggy behind us stopped, too.

"Here's where we start the toboggan," says Catty, and out he got.

"You're not going to monkey with Sile, are you?"

"Well," says Catty, "kind of." And he climbed the fence and dropped into the corn. I wasn't fond of picking rock salt out of where I sit down, but I went, too. We crawled in a ways, and then scroutched down between the rows and waited. The big one and the other one followed us right in. They came cautious and subtile as Indians. Catty and I kept going when we were sure they were after us, and headed for the strawberry patch.

"Now," says Catty, "you skin over toward Sile's house. I hear him chopping stove wood.

You call out to him that somebody's in his strawberries. See?"

I saw, but I didn't understand what I saw worth a cent. Orders was orders, though, so off I went. Sure enough, Sile was working alongside his woodshed, and I stepped out and says, "Sile, somebody's in your strawberry bed."

Well, sir, he dropped his ax and busted into the kitchen door, and out he came with a shotgun, and the way he streaked it through the corn to the strawberries was a caution. Just as Catty planned it, I guess, he came right in behind the big one and the other one, and the first thing I heard was Sile letting out a yell.

"Hands up, ye sneakin' thieves," says he. "Stick your hands right up as high as ye kin lift 'em, 'fore I fill ye fuller of holes than a sieve."

He had his gun aimed right at the men, and the men stopped and looked mighty unhappy.

"Say!" says the big one.

"Shet your mouth and put up your hands," says Sile.

"Put down that gun," says the big one. "What's the matter with you?"

"You be, you lurkin', strawberry-stealin' wampus," says Sile. "And I ketched you right

in the act. Don't ye give me no back talk nuther. Jail's where ye'll go for this, or I'm a tomcat. Had enough of this thievin' and stealin', and I aim to make an example out of you. Bad enough when its boys, but when growed men set to it, then it's time something was done."

"We didn't come to steal your strawberries," says the big one.

"Sure you didn't," says Sile, sarcastic-like. "You jest come in here to take a nap. If ye wa'n't after berries, what was you doin' in here?"

Well, that was a question they couldn't very well answer, because they couldn't go and tell how they were following Catty and me. If they did, Sile would want to know why they were following us—and there you were.

Sile got more and more sarcastic, and madder and madder. "No," says he, "I s'pose you wouldn't eat a strawberry if it was shoved in your mouth. Not you. Uh-uh. What you come for was nice, purple violets for a buttonhole bokay. Or mebby you come to dig worms for bait. I'll bait ye. . . . Now shet up your traps and march."

"You look here," says the big one, "you'll get into trouble pointing a gun at folks like that."

"Mebby. Law's perty severe on farmers that pertect their crops from thieves, hain't it? I calc'late ye'll collect heavy damages off'n me. . . . Wa-al, I'll give you cause and aggervation. You march."

They marched, grumbling and threatening, but Sile never paid a bit of attention. He just mogged on behind, and every time one of them turned, he wiggled his gun, and that was enough. He marched them out of the cornfield and into the farmyard and right up to the corncrib. The door was open.

"Git in," says he, "that's your roost for a spell."

"In there?" says the big one.

"Right in there," says Sile, polite as could be. "Hope ye'll be comfortable. Jest make yourselves to home."

"What's the idea?"

"The idea is that I'm busy this mornin'," says Sile, "and I hain't no time to go traipsin' in to the jail with ye. But I'll have time later in the day. In with ye."

They roared and kicked as loud as they dared, but in they got, and Sile slammed shut the door and clicked the padlock. That disposed of the spies for a while. Catty kind of chuckled and I felt middling happy myself.

"Now," he whispered, "we can call on Pawky."

We went back cautious to our rig and off we went down the road. First off we did our errands and delivered our goods to customers. Then we worked back pretty careful, because there was a chance somebody else might be watching for us, or just hunting around in the woods for Pawky. But we didn't see a soul. Not until we turned up an old tote road and into a thicket where we hitched Maude S. It was then we saw the Toop kid.

He was mosying along in the woods with a twenty-two rifle—after squirrels, I guess, but he was in an unlucky place to be squirrel hunting that morning. Unlucky for us, anyhow, if he saw us, which was exactly what he did.

"Huh," says he, "what you prowling around here for. Say. Want to scare all the game in the woods?"

"You won't find any game around here," says I, "but there's squirrels on the hardwood ridge back yonder."

"Oh, there are, are they?" says he, kind of snappy. "I guess I don't need you to tell me where to hunt."

"You need a lot of folks to tell you a lot of

things," says I, "and one of 'em is going to be told you by me, and that is that if you go getting fresh with me, you'll go home wearing your nose on the back of your neck."

"Two to one," says he.

"No," says I, "one to one."

"I wouldn't muss up my hands with you," says he. "I think too much of myself."

"I ain't so particular," says I, "I don't care who I lick. I can wash my hands afterwards."

"Got a rope?" says Catty in a whisper.

"Got a strong cord," says I, "about ten feet of it."

"Good," says he. Then he turned to Toop. "We're squatters," says he, "and we've squatted on this part of the woods. We've staked out a claim, and we don't want anybody monkeying around on it. So git."

"I won't," says Toop. "I got as much right here as you have."

"We can't monkey with him," says Catty soft-like.

"No," says I, and I began edging toward Toop. Catty started coming in from the other side. And then I had a thought.

"Come here," says I to Catty, and when he came I asked him what he intended to do with Toop.

"Tie him to a tree while we tend to business," says he.

"Be fun," says I, "but bad politics."

"Why?" says he.

"He'd tell his dad, and his dad would get the idea right off that we are too much interested in this part of the woods. No good letting on we're too anxious."

"Wee-wee," says Catty, "you've got it right. I was so anxious to hand something to Toop, that I lost sight of the main business."

"Well," says I, "what then?"

"Give him the slip," says Catty. He turned to Toop. "Maybe we can't chase you out of these woods," he says, "and maybe we can. But we haven't time to-day. But remember, you've got something coming to you."

"I'll be waiting for it," says Toop.

Catty turned off without another word and walked in the opposite direction to what we wanted to go and I followed. We walked fast, and when we got to a gully we laid low for ten minutes and then circled. We cut away back in the woods and then headed for the lake. When we got near the lighthouse we hid for ten minutes, but there was no sign of Toop, so we slid along and went out to where Pawky was. He wasn't in sight, so we went inside and

climbed. There he was, sitting on the floor with some dinguses in his ears, looking as happy as a cat that's caught a mouse.

"What you doing?" says I.

"Listening to some excellent music," says he.

"Git out," says I.

Well, he passed over the thingumbobs and I listened, and sure enough, there was a concert going on. "Not as clear," says he, "as if I had my device attached, but pretty good."

"Hungry?" says Catty.

"Now that I'm reminded of it," says he, "I am."

"Then I'll get your dinner," Catty says, and he went at it. We ate with Pawky and told him all that had happened, which made him pretty nervous.

"Something," says he, "must be done."

"What?" says Catty.

"I'm sure," says Mr. Pawky, "I don't know."

"You're a great help," Catty says.

"I've other things to think of. I'm working out a new idea."

"You'd better rescue your old one," Catty says, "because if you don't—Toop 'll get it away from you."

"No doubt you're right," says he, "but somehow I seem to see no means of doing it."

Catty hunched his shoulders. "I guess it's up to you and me," he says, and he said it like he was kind of tickled with the idea. "We'll have to find out what to do, and then do it. You just lay low, and leave it to us."

"We need something to do to keep us busy," says I, kind of sarcastic.

Catty was looking out of the window toward the shore.

"I guess we've got it," says he. "We didn't lose that Toop kid as much as we thought we did. There he is."

I looked and, sure enough, there he was. He stood a few minutes looking at the lighthouse, and then he waved his hand in a mean kind of a way, as much as to say, "Well, I've got you now," and then he turned and went away.

"Now what?" says I.

"Pawky," says Catty, "has got to move, and he's got to move quick."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

AS Catty says, if you've got to do a thing, the way to do it is to do it, and the sooner the suddener. It was clear that young Toop had seen enough to make him mighty suspicious. He would tell where he had seen us, and in no time at all somebody would be snooping around to find Pawky. We just naturally had to get him out of there and put him some place where he wouldn't be noticed. But, on the other hand, there wasn't any place I could think of that was as good as this old lighthouse.

"Let's kind of fortify this," says I, "and stand 'em off."

"Fine chance," says Catty. "Besides, we've got our business to 'tend to, and we can't stick around here to be a garrison. We're busy men."

"Yes," says I, "there's quite a ways to go yet before we land that million."

"Wait," says he, "till I get my idea worked out right, and you'll see how the money comes rolling in."

"Nobody's going to bother us for an hour or

so, anyhow," I says. "They'll be getting each other out of jail."

"And that's our chance," says Catty. "We've got Pawky's invention and papers safe—anyhow, I think so. But if they get hold of him it will spill the whole keg of nails. We've got to plant him some place where he'll be easy for us to get at, but impossible for them to find."

"Wish we could keep him in our office," says I.

Catty stepped off and looked at me. "Was that an idea," says he, "or did you just say it to have something to say?"

"Why?" says I.

"Because," says he, "if you thought it up, it's better than I've been giving you credit for; and if you just said it, why, then, you do a lot better not to think at all, but just to talk."

"What d'ye mean?" says I.

"I mean," he says, "that I believe we can hide Pawky right in our store and he'll be safer there than any place else in the county. Right under their noses, and where we can take care of him all the time. We could put him behind the partition, and never let him come out. He wouldn't either. Just give him a piece of wire to monkey with, and he'd stay in there and invent if the place was burning over his head."

"But," says I, "how would we get him there?"

"Wagon," says he.

"But we're watched."

"Never less than we are right now. I'll bet Toop has run off home to tell his dad. The other men are busy. We can sneak Pawky through the woods and make him lie down in the wagon and cover him over. Then we can drive into town as bold as brass and back up to our back door and rush him right in."

"It's risky," says I.

"If Columbus hadn't risked something he never would have discovered America," says he.

"But what'll Pawky say?"

"He won't have anything so say. He'll have to do as he's told."

Well, that was that. Catty sent me across to scout around in the woods to make sure Toop was gone. It didn't take me long, for I walked down along the edge of the lake and saw him rowing away in his boat. When I came back Catty had Pawky ready for the trip, wires and boxes and everything. We scooted him through the woods and piled him in the wagon on some straw and covered him with a canvas. I don't

WHEN I CAME BACK CATTY HAD PAWKY READY FOR THE TRIP, WIRES AND BOXES AND EVERYTHING

believe he had much idea what was happening to him, but he didn't kick about it a bit. Guess his mind was on something else. It gave me a kind of a funny feeling to be riding along that way with a man hidden in the wagon, and Catty nudged me and says,

"Don't look so doggone guilty."

"Can't help it," says I.

"You've got to help it," says he. "We'll be meeting folks right along, and if they see you looking the way you do, they'll call the sheriff on general principles. You look," says he, "like a man that had stolen a horse and was trying to carry it home in his pocket."

Well, we got into town all right and drove up Main Street. We passed Mr. Toop himself coming out of the justice's office, and both of his men were with him, so I guess he got them out of their scrape all right. Catty grinned.

"Wouldn't they jump out of their skins if they knew?" he says. "Gee, I'd like to stop and talk to them."

"Not for me," says I, "I want to be somewheres else quick. Say, if this is the way a criminal feels, I'm going to stay honest all my life."

Toop and his big man were looking at us, and Catty grinned. "Hey," he called out, "how'd you like strawberries?"

Mr. Toop kind of laughed, but the big man scowled and said something disagreeable.

"Let this," says Catty, sober-like, "teach you not to monkey with the buzz saw."

"What d'ye mean?" says the man.

"Nothin' much," says Catty, kind of provoking.

"Hey you, hold up. I want to talk to you, kid."

"Takes two to make a confab," says Catty. "I don't want to talk to you—to-day. Maybe I will sometime, and when I do, I'll drop you a postal."

I was almost busting, and if he hadn't driven on right then I'd have blown up with a bang, but he did drive on. We got to our store and Catty turned in and backed right up to the back door.

"Cast your eye around and see if it's safe," says he.

We both took a good look, and nobody was in sight, so we sneaked Pawky out of the wagon and ran him into our back room.

"I wish," says Catty to him, "that you had long green whiskers or something for a dis-

guise. I wonder if we couldn't get him some. Then we wouldn't need to hide him."

"I will not," says Mr. Pawky as dignified as could be, "I will not wear false whiskers."

"Young man," says Catty, "if it's necessary and I tell you to, you'll wear a necklace of lemon wafers. Now make yourself comfortable. We'll fix you up as snug as a bug in a rug. But don't stick your nose out of this room, and don't talk. The idea," he explained, "is that you're hiding. The way to hide is to hide."

"Precisely," says Mr. Pawky. "I shall convert this room into a laboratory. It will be very convenient."

"Convert in into a quiet laboratory," says Catty.

"How about that Big Idea?" says I. "It's about time to shoot if we're going to before school starts up."

"Um. . . . Come on and we'll sit down and think it over."

So we went into the office and sat down and I thought and thought and kept on thinking, but all I seemed to manage to think about was what a good day it was to go swimming, and that probably the bass were biting, and that I wished I had a snare drum, and why our team didn't win more games and such-like things.

There wasn't a cent in a single think. Catty kind of wiggled around and scratched his head and chewed his lip, and then he says,

"To make money you've got to sell something."

"Yes," says I.

"And to have something to sell, you've got to own something, or find something, or make something, or buy something."

"Sure," says I.

"And the more people there are who want what you've got, the surer you are of making money."

"Yes."

"And the less expensive it is to sell, the more folks will buy it."

"Unless," says I, "it's foolish and they can't afford it."

"Um. . . . Now what is something that everybody here will want that nobody is giving them?"

"Money," says I.

He just grunted. "There must be some—some commodity—that this town is crying for."

"Commodity is about the best word you've got off to-day," says I. "Yes, there must be one, but the real thing would be to find some-

thing they had to have whether they wanted it or not—something necessary."

"Um. . . . Now you're talking. What is necessary?"

"Bread and water and salt and gasoline and coal and wood," says I.

"We're getting warm," he says. "Now if we could just hit on something that we can get and nobody else can, and that folks have got to have."

"That," says I, "would be fine. But what might it be?"

"Hanged if I know. But there's something. . . . By cracky!" he said, all of a sudden. "Firewood."

"Eh?"

"Look at the coal strike. Coal 's going to be hard to get, I'll bet you. Folks aren't thinking much about it yet, but they will be. And it will be expensive. And almost everybody here uses wood for the kitchen, and there are lots of stoves and fireplaces. I heard a couple of men talking the other day about how hard it was to get firewood, even with all the trees there are growing around here. Nobody will cut it. Nobody makes a business of it. Wee-wee, I believe we've hit it on the head."

"Where'd we get it?"

"Off where dad's company is cutting logs. There's lots of tops and slashings that would make fine firewood, but they just lie and go to waste. There's thousands of cords of perfectly good wood rotting in the woods all around. I'll bet we could saw and cut a thousand cords off dad's place without turning a hair."

"How would we get it? Who'd cut it?"

"Hire men—and get a buzz saw—and wagons to deliver. Why, I'll bet we could sell other towns, too. I'll bet we could sell thousands of cords if we can manage to get it sawed."

"How'll we find out?"

"I'll see dad. We'll find out what we can get the wood for. Ought to get it for almost nothing, because it's going to waste. Then there are slabs from the mill. We could buy them all up, and maybe dad would saw them on the slasher for us. The thing to do is to choke off every possible source of supply, so that nobody but us will have any wood to sell."

"Sounds big," says I. "How much would we make?"

"No limit," says he, "especially if we ship to other towns. Do a wholesale business as well as a retail."

"Looks too hard for kids to handle," says I.

"Why?" says he. "We sell pop corn, don't we? And ice cream? What's the difference. We have to pop our corn and make our cream. If we can sell one thing we can sell another. I'm going to see dad right now."

"Where does the finance come in?"

"Can't swing it without capital, can we? Have to have money to buy the wood and to pay our men. . . . And the idea. The idea is the big thing in finance."

"Suppose," says I, "we sold a thousand cords. How much would we make?"

"A lot," says he, "I'll bet we'd make more than a dollar a cord."

"Golly!" says I.

"It won't be easy. There'll be lots of work and lots of figuring, and with all our other projects going on we'll be busier than a cat trying to get fly paper off its feet. Are you game?"

"Sure," says I. "Hop to it. But don't forget Pawky. We're financiers, but we're nursemaids, too."

"Maybe we can use him somehow. Never can tell."

"Suppose we do tackle this," says I, "how do we sell it?"

"We get out and hustle."

"And suppose there's somebody else goes into it?"

"Competition? Well, we've got to expect that. But if we have to buck competition, the thing to do is to get started and get on the ground first. Always get the jump on the other fellow."

"Fine," says I. "Let's get at it. I'm all het up for that million, and this looks like a chance to get a fine piece of it."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

MAYBE you remember Mr. Atkins and how he came to our town nothing but a tramp, with straggly whiskers, and his hair all over the lot and as shiftless as anybody could be. And maybe you remember how Catty decided his family shouldn't be shiftless any more, and so made his father settle down and go to work, and then Mr. Atkins got so as to like it, and trimmed his beard and cut his hair, and after a while got into a regular business with a factory and lots of men working for him—making novelties out of wood. Well, whether you remember it or not, it was so.

I tell you this because Catty and I went to see Mr. Atkins as soon as we got the Big Idea. He was in his office whittling. Generally he was whittling when he wasn't fishing, but he was most valuable when he was fooling around with his knife, because it was then he got up the novelties for his company to manufacture. We went right into his office and he looked up and smiled and acted like he was glad to see us. I

guess he was. He always was glad to see folks. Catty didn't wait a second.

"Dad," he said, "you know that quarter section you're logging on the edge of town."

"I've heard of it," says Mr. Atkins.

"Well, there are a lot of tops and slashings and such-like laying around, aren't there?"

"To be sure. To be sure."

"What d'you do with 'em?"

"Heap 'em up and burn 'em," says Mr. Atkins.

"Um. . . . Nuisance to you, aren't they?"

"Consid'able."

"Well, say somebody was to come in with maybe eight or ten men and clean all that out of your way—save you the trouble, would it be worth anything to you?"

I kind of got bug-eyed at that. Here Catty was trying to get paid for taking wood he expected to sell for a lot of money. That was more nerve than I ever expected to stand up and see. Catty told me afterwards that was real business. He said that was the first principle when you were trying to get rich—to make the other fellow think you are doing him a favor and make him pay for it, when really he was doing you a whopping favor himself. It sounded kind of complicated and ungrateful

to me, but maybe business is different from real life.

"Why," says Mr. Atkins, "I don't know that it would be worth much to us."

"You wouldn't pay the men's wages that did it for you?"

"Wa-al, I hardly think so. You see we mostly let those tops lay and it isn't hardly worth the trouble of heaping them up to burn."

"But they're dangerous," says Catty. "Nine forest fires out of ten start in slashings."

"Mebby so. . . . Mebby so."

"It wouldn't be worth anything to you if somebody dragged all that stuff away, eh?"

"Not to speak of. If anybody was dum fool enough to drag it off, he could have it and welcome, but that's about all I say."

"Um. Suppose Catty and I wanted to hire some men to haul that heavier stuff off, could we have it?"

"Sure. Say, what's the idea, anyhow?"

"Oh, we just thought maybe we could make a little money out of it. Firewood, you know."

"Firewood, eh? Calc'late that stuff would saw up into wood all right. Don't seem to be much firewood hereabouts either. Nobody'll take the trouble to saw and split. Rather let

the wood rot than use it. Um. . . . Sure, you boys can have all you want."

"And if we wanted to move a buzz saw on to a corner of the place would it be in the way?"

"Not if you put it where it was out of the way," says Mr. Atkins.

"And we can have all we want?"

"You can have all there is—but I don't guess you'll want much. Sawing and splitting wood ain't any fun."

Catty sort of grinned to himself. "You never can tell," he says.

We hustled out to talk some more, because when you're going into a big thing you have to do a lot of talking and planning, and figuring. We went to the office and sat down and got paper and pencils, and there wasn't ever a board of directors of a corporation that did any harder work than we did right there. No, sir, the way we laid into that job was a caution to cats.

"Let's see," says I, "we get our wood for nothing. That's that. How much 'll it cost us to saw it up into stove lengths?"

"I don't know, but it hadn't ought to cost much. We've got to find out how many cords a buzz saw can saw in a day, and what wages we'll have to pay men to run it. We'll have to

hire more men to swamp out the big pieces and carry them to the saw, and we'll have to hire horses and wagons and men to deliver it. I want to tell you, Wee-wee, this is a whopping big thing with a lot of ends to it that have to be looked after. Why, we'll have to keep books and everything."

"You can do that," says I, "without any contest from us. Keep books! Whoo! And add up figures all the time. You go to it, Old Turnip, I don't want any."

"Huh," says he, "if we keep books I'll have to do it, if it's done right."

"Sure," says I, "but how many men will we have to hire, and how much will we have to pay them, and how much can we sell our wood for, and how much wood can we sell?"

"That," says he, "is a thing we've got to find out."

"And where," says I, "will we get a buzz saw?"

"We'll have to look into that, too. Say, it seems to me it would be more economical to buy us a buzz saw than it would be to rent one. Anyhow, we can look into that."

"They have to have an engine, don't they?"

"Gas engine," says Catty. "I've seen 'em running with little gas engines."

"Um. Ought not to cost much—if we can find one second hand. Say, s'pose we could sell our wood for maybe five dollars a cord, and it didn't cost us more than a dollar a cord to manufacture and deliver it. And we sold a thousand cords. Whoop-ee! Four thousand dollars profit!"

"Wee-wee," says Catty, "four thousand dollars isn't much money. It isn't even a good start toward that million."

"How much capital have we got now, eh? We started with fifty dollars. How much have we made?"

"Don't know exactly. Of course, we've got some invested in stock and one thing and another, and just how much we have in the bank I don't know. I left our bank book to be written up. But we want to find out so as to know just how much we can spend on the start."

"The way we been working, what with our route at the lake, and cutting grass, and pop corn and odd jobs on the side, and our hardware project, we ought to have a whopping lot."

"We've done pretty good," he says. "Nothing to be ashamed of."

"And we'll keep up all our enterprises," says I, "while we're sawing wood?"

"Sure. Can't give up any paying business. That lawn mowing is bringing us in good money, and so is the route, and we must make ten or eleven dollars out of pop corn and refreshments every week."

"Say," says I, "I'll bet there are *men* that aren't making any more than we are right now."

"Then," says he, "they ought to be ashamed of themselves."

"Of course," says I, "there are heaps of men that haven't got the ideas we've got."

"Well," he says, "that's something in our favor. But honest, Wee-wee, I'd hate to have some of the ideas you've got."

"Oh, you would," says I, "and I'd hate to hate myself like you do."

"Such as my partner," he says, and then he grinned and got up. "Let's find out all about stove wood so we'll know what we're at. We don't want to go and do any jumping in the dark."

"You bet not," says I.

So we started out, and the first place we went to was the coal yard, and there was Lant Parsons sitting in his office. We went in and Lant asked what in tunket we wanted. Catty told him we just dropped in.

"All right," he says, "now just drop out again."

"Sure," says Catty, "but have you got any stove wood to sell?"

"No, nor I haven't got anything else to sell. I haven't a chunk of coal, and pretty soon folks is goin' to be hollerin' their heads off. Say, I can't git coal to save my life. I'll bet before spring comes folks in this town 'll be burning up the dinin' room table to keep warm."

"Bad as that, eh? Why?"

"Coal strike," says he.

"Um. . . . And you haven't any wood?"

"Nary stick."

"If you did have any, what would you sell it for?"

"Depend."

"On what?"

"On how much it cost me."

"Well, how much would it cost you?"

"How do I know?"

"Didn't you ever sell any stove wood?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

"Dollar and a quarter a cord, delivered. Cost a quarter more a cord to split and pile."

That hit us hard in the stummicks, until Catty says, "When was that?"

"Eighteen eighty-two," he says.

"Yes," says I, "but haven't you sold any since that? Didn't you sell any last year?"

"I did."

"How much?"

"About fifty cord," says he.

"I mean how much a cord."

"Five-fifty, and dummed if I don't b'lieve I lost money on it."

"Wonder what folks would be willing to pay for wood this year?"

"Before they get through with it," he says, "they'll be willing to pay almost anythin'—or freeze to death. But they won't be able to git any. Nobody'll saw up stove wood any more, seems as though. Dunno why, they jest hain't doin' it."

"Would they pay six dollars a cord?"

"Yes. . . ." He scowled and remembered he had been talking sort of pleasant, and says, "What business is it of your'n what they'd pay? Git out of here and quit pesterin' me. Git, 'fore I boot ye."

We got, but we knew a lot more about the wood business than when we went in, and it looked more and more to us like an enterprise that was going to be a paying one if we could get it to working.

"What next?" says I.

"Men," says Catty. "See what we can hire men for."

"How 'll we find that out?"

"Catch a man, put salt on his coat tails, and ask him."

Well, we met old Socrates Goodman on the street, and we stopped him, because we knew he worked sometimes and ought to know what men were paid.

"Mr. Goodman," says Catty, "if you were to take a job right now, how much would you want a day?"

"I'd want a hundred dollars," says old Socrates, "but I wouldn't git it."

"How much would you get?"

"Mebby four dollars."

"Uh-huh, and for four dollars how many cords of wood could you saw on a buzz saw?"

"Dunno. I s'pose I could saw five-six hunderd cords, mebby a thousand. Never set out to see how much work I could do in a day. Nobody'd ever let me. No, sir. I work too hard and too fast. I'm too good a worker. Men that hires me allus says to me, 'Soc, remember most men hain't as good as you be, so hold back on the britchin'.' If you work full tilt you'll up and kill the rest of the gang. So

I allus takes it right easy—and then does about three men's labor."

"Well, taking it easy, how much would you saw?"

"Not a doggone stick," says he, "because I hain't got no taste fer sawin'. It aches my back. But if you're lookin' for a man to saw wood, why don't you go talk to Sam Print? He's got him one of them gasoline buzz saws, and he ort to know all about it."

Well, we set out hotfoot for Mr. Print's to ask about his buzz saw, and just as we got there a little automobile came driving up, and in it was young Toop, and out he jumped and ran right up to Mr. Print's front door and knocked.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

IT kind of gave me a start to see young Toop going there, and I said right off to Catty that I'd bet there was a haze over the moon. He didn't say anything, but his mouth sort of got straight and determined-like, and you could see in a minute that young Toop was in for hard labor if he threw a monkey wrench in our machinery. Well, we went around to the back door, because out our way you don't go to the front door unless you're company or there's a wedding or a funeral. Somehow it's more friendly and homey just to go poking around the back.

Mrs. Print came to the door, and we asked for her husband. She gave us a pleasant smile, because that's the sort of person she is, and says, "He's here, but another boy just came to see him. Why don't you go right in?"

Catty kind of chuckled, and said he guessed we would, so we went through the dining room and into the parlor, where young Toop was sitting in all his glory and gabbing about five pecks to the bushel. Mr. Print looked up and

says, "Gee, it's raining boys on me to-day. What's all the excitement?"

"I came to talk business," says Toop, kind of snooty, "and don't care to be interrupted."

"All right, young feller. Go right ahead. Nobody's got any check rein on you."

"Well," says Toop, "I hear you own a saw and rent it out to saw wood."

"I do," says Mr. Print.

"Well," says Toop, "I'm going into the wood business. My father's clearing some land to make a lawn and a big garden and tennis courts and things, and he said I could have the trees that were cut down. He said it was time I was learning to be a business man, so he wants me to have that wood cut and sell it, and I get whatever money comes from the sale."

"Um. . . . Sounds int'restin'. How much was you figgerin' on payin' for the use of my saw?"

"That's for you to say," says Toop, and his voice was none too polite either. "It's your saw."

"To be sure 'tis. You said a true word, sonny. S'pose you want to hire a man to run the saw, too?"

"You don't expect me to run it myself, certainly."

Mr. Print grinned. "I dunno exactly what I would expect of you. Don't know ye well enough yit. . . ." And then he turned to Catty. "Well, what kin I do for you folks?"

"We came to see you about your saw," says Catty.

"Same saw?"

"Identical," says Catty, and he grinned that pleasant sort of fetching grin of his. "Popular saw you've got to-day."

"Goin' to cut fishpoles?" says Mr. Print.

"No," says Catty, "we was kind of figuring on toothpicks. We're all out of toothpicks at home, and dad told me I'd better saw up two or three cords before Sunday dinner. We expect company, and, if the meat's tough, we'll probably need a lot."

"It's a fust-rate toothpick saw," says Mr. Print.

"Look here," says Toop, "I was here first, and I spoke first for that saw, and it's mine."

"Your'n, eh?" says Mr. Print. "Looks like there was mebby a mistake some'eres. I kinder figgered it was mine."

"Anyhow I spoke for it, and I got the money to pay for it, and these kids haven't. Why my father ——"

"Yes?" says Mr. Print kind of interested-like.

"My father's a millionaire, and he could buy your whole farm and throw it away if he wanted to, and he could buy this whole town. That's what he could."

"Um. . . . Pervidin' I'd sell out to him," says Mr. Print. "Money's a nice thing to own, but it hain't a nice thing to be owned by. Remember what old Abe Lincoln said once? He says, says he, that no matter how tall or how short a feller was, his legs was allus just long enough to reach to the ground. Guess that goes for millionaires."

Toop didn't have anything to say to this, but he sat looking pretty sulky and disagreeable, so Mr. Print says to Catty, "Well, you heard what this feller's got to say. He spoke first for my saw. Why sh'u'd I let it to you instid of him?"

"Well," says Catty, "you aren't obligated to let it to anybody."

"That's true."

"And you're entitled to pick out the one you do let it to."

"Fact."

"And to set your own price."

"Sure."

"And all things being equal, a man would rather do business with his friends that has just

ordinary good manners, than with a stranger that hasn't any manners at all."

Well, Mr. Print was like to bust out laughing at that, but he didn't. He only said that was a fair statement of fact.

"Besides," says Catty, "no man wants to make a bargain until all the bids are in, does he? It ain't good business to close with the first offer, because the second offer might be a lot better."

"What you say 's got sense in it," says Mr. Print. "What's your offer, Catty?" He turned to Toop and says, "Your proposition, I understand, is to rent my saw for what I decide to charge for it?"

"That's my offer," says Toop.

"And you stand by it?"

"I got the money, all right."

"Good. Now, Catty, what's your proposition?"

"It's this," says Catty. "Wee-wee and I are going into business, not just to play, but like regular business men. We will rent your saw, but we want to hire you with it, for four dollars a day. That is, we'll pay you four dollars a day to manage the saw, and pay rent besides. Or we'll hire you to run it, and buy the saw outright at a fair price."

"How much?" says Mr. Print.

"Well, that saw and engine and outfit cost you two hundred even when you bought it second hand. You've used it a year. We'll give you a hundred and twenty-five for it."

"How long will this job of work last?" says Mr. Print, like he was amused.

"Till snow flies, and if things keep up right, all winter."

"Say," says Mr. Print, "what be you gittin' at? D'ye mean you kids is prepared to offer me a stretch of stiddy work?"

"We do."

"What you got back of you—sort of guaranteein' you? This feller here 's got a millionaire dad."

"We got a reputation for dealing square and for keeping our word, and for 'tending to business," says Catty.

Mr. Print just looked a minute, and then he slapped his knee. "Dummed if that hain't an ample sufficiency," says he. "You git the saw."

"Huh. My dad 'll buy me a saw from the city," says Toop. "It'll be a better saw 'n yours, and I'll show you. I'll show you till you're mighty sick of it."

With that he got up and put his hat on right in the house and marched out to his car. After

that we talked business with Mr. Print and got a lot of valuable pointers. He said he would haul his saw out to the workings in the morning, and would have two other men and a team on the job, too—good workers, he said, and he thought he could get them for three-fifty a day.

Well, that finished up that part of the deal, and you better believe we were pretty well satisfied with it. We had our crew all ready, and nothing to do now but start to work—except to sell the wood.

"I knew something would come up to mess things," says I. "This Toop kid 'll sell wood for anything he can get. He don't care whether he makes money or not, because all he makes he gets, and dad pays the bills."

"Maybe," says Catty, kind of grand, "he'll disturb the market some, but I don't believe his output 'll be big enough to create a serious condition."

"Um. . . ." says I, "what book did you get that out of?"

"I didn't," he says, "that's just plain, ordinary business talk, like business men talk every day."

"Do they know what it means," says I, "or is it just noise like a college yell?"

"As soon as you are familiar with condi-

tions," says Catty, "such matters will be clear to you."

"Gosh," says I, "that's fine. Talk it some more. It's a regular language by itself, isn't it? Like French or hog Latin. Honest, do business men talk it right out to each other?"

"Of course," says Catty.

"I'm going to learn me some of it and spring it on dad at the supper table. Bet it 'll knock him clean out of his chair. What was the first one again? It had a kind of a zing to it. Um. . . . 'Disturb the market some,' that was it, wasn't it? With words like 'output' and such thrown in. Say a lot more and say it often so I'll get used to it."

"Wee-wee," says he, "there are times when I think you are trying to josh me."

"You're wrong," says I. "I couldn't bear to do it."

"Now," says he, "we want to canvass the situation."

"Whoop!" I says, "that one's the best yet."

He didn't pay any attention. "We want to find out how much wood this town can absorb."

"Absorb." That's what he said. The very word. I got what it meant, but it sounded right funny. A blotter absorbs ink, but a town absorbing wood is something else again. I

could see a picture right before my eyes of a town sucking in piles of wood like a blotter sucks in ink. I most busted out laughing, but I didn't dare. He was so serious I didn't even dare grin. But I saved it up to laugh about when I got home to bed.

"We've got to find out how much wood this town uses normally," says he, and he got that one out easier than any of the rest. "It must burn a certain number of cords every winter, whether there's a coal strike or not. And with a coal strike, we've got to estimate how much more will be consumed." That's what he said. Just as if he read it out of a book. I was kind of staggered.

"All right," says I, "let's go and measure up how much she absorbs."

"Good," says he. "I'd explain to you what the saturation point was, if I had time, but I sha'n't. I will some other time when we aren't so busy."

"Much obliged," says I, and right then and there I made up my mind I'd dig up a string of business words to spring on him, and when I did, I says to myself, I'll make his saturation point look like somebody had knocked the point right off of it.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

"WHAT," says I, "are we going to do about Pawky? Or are we just going to hide him all the rest of our lives?"

"I wonder," says Catty.

"Seems to me," says I, "he'd be better off to give his static invention to Toop or anybody else, and be free to go around about his business, than to stay hiding the way he is. There isn't any money and there isn't any pleasure in it."

"That's right," says Catty.

"Well, what's the answer?"

"The answer isn't printed in the back of the book," says Catty. "We've got to work out the example."

"Maybe," says I, "but I haven't got that far in arithmetic. I guess Pawky comes under the head of higher mathematics."

"He comes under the head of darn nuisances," says Catty.

Whatever head he came under, there he was, right back of our partition, and always in our minds. We couldn't help thinking and worry-

ing about him, and it was disturbing. When a man is a business man, like we were, he wants to give all his attention to his business, and not have a lot of side issues taking his attention off it. Business is something that has to be watched and worked at, and thought about and slept over. Just as soon as something else comes along that takes your attention away, why, you're out of luck. Business first, last, and all the time, is the only way—but we were fixed so we couldn't do it that way.

Pawky was such a funny person, too. You never could tell what he'd be up to, or when he might get absent-minded and just walk out into the middle of the street or some fool thing, and then Toop would be down on him like a hen hawk. It wasn't fun to think about it. I wished we could have kept him in the old light-house, but we couldn't, so that was that. On the whole, he was safer where he was, and a lot easier to take care of.

Well, we couldn't stop to fiddle about him and his invention that day, because we had to find out how many cords of wood our town could absorb, like Catty said. Every time I said that it made me snicker. Golly, but folks do use words funny lots of times, and when they're serious, too.

"How do we find out?" I asked Catty. "Do we go to every house and ask how much wood they burn?"

"Take too long," says he "we've got to hit on some way to make a fairly accurate estimate."

"Hop right to it," says I.

"Well, your folks haven't a furnace. You've got one coal stove in the parlor, but you've got a wood stove in the dining room and you've got a wood stove in the kitchen. How many cords does your father buy in the fall?"

"I know that doggone well," says I, "because I have to split and pile it when it comes, and dad gives me a quarter a cord for doing it. There's twenty-five cords of it, and I want to sit up in bed and announce that that's a lot."

"Um. . . . There are about twelve hundred people in town; that would make about two hundred houses. Then there are stores, say twenty stores of all kinds, and four churches. If everybody used twenty-five cords that would be five thousand cords for the houses alone, wouldn't it?"

"Sounds so," says I.

"I know the Congo church heats with wood. They must use fifty to sixty cords."

"But I bet it's given to them or something."

"Maybe. Anyhow, it's safe to say that there

aren't any five thousand cords burned here—not by a jugful. But if we cut it down to an average of five cords a house, there's a thousand cords, without counting stores and the Masonic Hall and things like that. I think we're safe on figuring a thousand cords."

"And you still think we can get six dollars a cord?"

"I believe we can."

"So that's six thousand dollars. Um. . . ."

"But we've got competition. I wonder how many cords the Toop kid will cut?"

"We ought to find out," says I. "I don't know how much clearing his father's going to do."

"Know what I bet?" he says.

"What?"

"Why, Toop'll wait until he sees what we're selling for, and then he'll cut the price."

"But he doesn't know we're cutting any," says I.

"He's no fathead, whatever else he may be. He was there when we bought the saw, wasn't he?"

"To be sure."

"So he'll put two and two together."

"Maybe he won't cut any on account of not having a saw," says I.

"His pa'll buy him a saw," says Catty, and that, of course, is exactly what happened.

That afternoon we dropped in on Lant Parsons at the coal yard, just on the off chance he would be good natured for a few minutes, and he was.

"Say," he says," has all the kids in the state got interested in stove wood?"

"Why?" says Catty.

"There was another one here asking me all kinds of questions about it, like you did."

"No. Who was he?"

"That Toop boy that lives out at the lake."

"Oh. What was he interested in wood for?"

"It seems like his pa's goin' to clear some land, and he's give the wood to the kid. He come nosin' around to see what I'd give for it, or what it was wuth."

"What did you tell him?"

"Told him I'd give him two-'n-a-half a cord, which I would," says Parsons. "But he didn't want to sell to me. He says whatever profit there was in it, he wanted himself."

"Um. . . ."

"But he wanted to make a deal with me, just the same. He says, says he, 'I guess I can sell wood cheaper than anybody else, because it doesn't cost me anything. But I haven't any

sales force,' says he. And then he says, 'How'd you like to handle it for me on commission—so much a cord just for handling it?' "

"And what did you say?"

"I said I might consider it, which I will do—if the commission's enough."

"Did he say how much he expected to cut?"

"Told me his father's man estimated there'd be between four and five hundred cords."

"Didn't set a price, did he?"

"No, but he let on he'd undersell anybody else in the market."

Catty sat and thought a spell and then he got up and walked around and kicked the fence and made faces at himself, and then came back.

"Lant," he says, "would you like to make that commission awful easy?"

"Sure thing."

"How much were you thinking of charging?"

"Ten per cent."

"Um. . . . If you could sell the whole kaboodle at once, and no trouble to you at all, would you divide your commission? I mean, if somebody came in and offered to take the whole lot, would you give him five per cent?"

"And me not turn over my hand?"

"Exactly."

"I'd do it."

"Good. Then we'll talk business. He'll probably sell cheaper if he can sell the lot at once. Sounds reasonable he should. Well, you go to him, and offer to take the whole kit and boiling off his hands, and see the best price you can squeeze him down to. See? If you get him low enough, maybe we'll give you more commission."

"Yep."

"But you get a signed contract out of him. Understand that, and you tell him that, because he's a kid, you want his father to sign that contract so as to make it legal. Get the idea?"

"I do."

"And make that contract guarantee delivery right here in your yard alongside the railroad, where it can be loaded on cars if we want to."

"Sure."

"And make it guarantee to deliver by a certain date."

"Yep."

"With an agreement that if he fails to deliver you can go on the land, and use his tools and saw and everything, and cut what the contract calls for and pay for it whatever price we agree on in the first place, less what it costs you to cut and haul here."

"Sounds doggone businesslike. But what's the idea?"

"Tell you later. But it means business. There's no monkey work about it. Now you go and see what you can do about price and everything, and then come to our office and talk some more."

"Who's goin' to buy all this wood?"

"Never you mind that. We've got a buyer."

"Has he got the cash?"

"He has to have to buy, doesn't he? Cash on delivery."

"Sounds all right to me," says Lant. "I'll try to see him to-day."

"Good," says Catty, and off he mogged, with me at his heels.

"Say," I says when we got out of earshot, "what's the big idea? What you doing, anyhow?"

"Trying to put a spoke in Toop's wheel, and to stabilize the market," he says.

"Do what to the market?"

"Stabilize it," he says.

"Oh," says I, "you mean you're going to resort to keen methods of competition in order to force your competitors to realize that a state of normalcy has not yet been arrived at."

He stopped and looked me over for a minute

and then he waggled his head. "Wee-wee," he says, "this firm's going to be a great success. It's whang-bang, chock-full of education, isn't it?"

"Yours of even date received," says I, "and contents noted. But what's this big talk to Lant Parsons? You don't mean we're going to buy five hundred cords of wood from Toop!"

"If we can," says he.

"But," says I, "at the lowest price, that'll be around two thousand large, heavy dollars."

"I know it," says he.

"We haven't got it, not a fraction of it."

"Right, Wee-wee."

"Then how are we going to get away with it?"

"I'd give a lead dollar and a pound of peanuts if I knew," says he.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

FROM now on you'd better believe we were pretty busy. I don't believe there were ever two kids who had as much to do, and on top of our business matters was Pawky. There he was, hid up in our back room, and what the dickens were we to do with him, and that's what I said to Catty.

"Look here," says I, "in thirty or forty years Pawky's whisker's 'll grow so long they 'll fill up this place like it was a mow full of hay. We got to do something about him."

"Yes," says Catty, "but I haven't time to bother with it to-day, and Pawky's happy."

"But," says I, "it isn't sensible to keep him cooped up here. If he had any sense he wouldn't do it."

"Inventors haven't any sense. That's why they're inventors," Catty says, "and what we're going to do with him in the long run I can't see. His old invention's safe, I guess."

"What does he want to do with it?" I says.

"Don't believe he knows."

"Then," says I, "we'd better find out for

him. Folks do something with inventions beside hide them in caves."

"They patent 'em," says Catty, "and then sell 'em for a lot of money."

"Then," says I, "let's do that to Pawky's. Because, sure as shootin', somebody's going to run on to him sooner or later."

"Right now," says Catty, "I'm thinking about sawing stove wood and selling stove wood. We've contracted to buy all young Toop saws and we've got to have money to pay for it when he delivers it. If we don't look out we're going to be bankrupt before we get started."

"What for did you agree to buy it, then?"

"Had to, didn't we. Otherwise he'd have upset the market, and we wouldn't have got our price for our own wood."

"Then," says I, "the thing to do is to cut our wood and deliver it and get the money before Toop can cut and deliver his wood to us."

"We can try," says Catty, "but we've got to find a quicker way than that if we can."

"Go to it," says I. "The quicker the sooner."

"We better go out and see how things are getting along," says he, so we got in our wagon and out we went. We knew there ought to be at least four men at work—two on the saw and

two with the team, and we hoped they were working good and hard, because we had to pay them money for it. I said to myself that if we found them sitting on a stump telling stories, I'd be pretty sore. Well, that was the first time it ever struck me just what it means to work for anybody, and that it isn't fair to take wages and then loaf. No, sir. If a man pays you for eight hours' work, then it's your business to give him eight hours' work. Just like buying eggs. If you buy twelve eggs the grocer mustn't give you ten and eat the other two himself. That wouldn't be honest. You never can tell when an idea like that comes to you. I mentioned it to Catty, and he told me I'd better be careful or I'd get a headache.

Well, things were going along pretty well. The team was hauling big limbs from the slashings and the saw was buzzing, and a pile of wood was growing that made me feel pretty good.

"Why," says I, "we can start delivering right off and begin to make money."

"Yes," says Catty, "and that's what we're going to do. We've got to hire another team and wagon and man."

So back we went to town and fussed around till we got a man with a couple of horses and

the kind of a wagon we could haul wood on, and then we started deliveries. You'd better believe it felt good, because what I wanted was to see the money coming in instead of going out. And so we got that started, and there was nothing to do but hustle for more orders and tend to the rest of our business, and worry about where we were going sell the wood we bought from young Toop.

By the end of that week we had called on everybody in town, and taken every order for wood that was to be got. It was a lot of wood, too, but the way Catty figured it, we could deliver it all from our own cuttings and would have Toop's five hundred cords left over to dispose of, and we'd have to pay for it, and it began to look to me like we'd be left with it on our hands, which would eat up every cent of profit we made, and a lot more besides. The way it seemed to me we would have all our work for nothing except to find we owed a lot of money we never could pay.

"Fine lot of millionaires we'll be," says I to Catty.

"What you worrying about?" says he. "If money was to be made without any trouble at all, everybody'd be rich. It's the fellow who can put through a deal that other folks couldn't

put through who gets to be a millionaire. The more impossible this looks the better I like it."

"Everybody to his taste," says I, "as the man said to the boy who ate the angleworm."

Just then Pawky began to call, as careless as if he wasn't hiding at all.

"I say, you boys. Come here. Right away. There's something I want you to do."

"There generally is," says Catty, "what's this one?"

"I've just thought up an improvement," says he.

"To what?" says I?

"To the device for eliminating static," he says. "It's a simple thing, too. Funny I never hit on it before. . . . Now I've got to have my instrument and the drawings. Where are they? I want them right off—now."

"They're hidden, and you know it," says Catty.

"Well, go get them," says Pawky.

"We're bust," says Catty.

"Tell me how to get to them, and I'll—I'll go myself," he says.

"You can't," says I, "you're hiding. You stay right where you are. D'you think we're going to take all the trouble we have to hide you, and then have you go prancing out in the

broad daylight, to have Mister Toop drop down on you like a hawk on a henyard? Not much."

"I got to have that instrument," says he, as stubborn as a mule.

"All right," says Catty, "we'll get it for you the first chance we have. It's safer where it is. Nobody can find it. But if you think you've got to have it, why, that's all there is to it."

"When will you get it?" says he. It seemed like he couldn't take care of more than one idea at a time.

"To-day," says Catty, "if we can dodge Toop's spies."

"We can't," says I. "And this thing is just made to order for them. What happens if they trail us out to the cave, and see us get that box? Why, in about two jerks of a lamb's tail, they'll snake it away from us, and then the fat's in the fire."

"Got to take the chance," says Catty, and he seemed kind of tickled that he had to. Now I'm not that way. When I'm safe I like to be safe. I don't run around hankering for trouble, or to take risks, but Catty! Huh! All you have to do is to show him how he's got to take a big risk and he goes for it like a puppy after a ham bone.

"Anyhow," says I, "we've got to go out and

see how business is getting along. That's got to be seen first. And we ought to sneak around and find out how much wood young Toop's got cut, because he's going to start delivering to the coal yard one of these days, and we've got to have money to pay him with. If he starts in too sudden, we'll be in the soup."

"So long as we have a spoon when we fall in instead of a fork," says Catty, "we'll come out all right."

So we mogged out to our job. As we got closer I listened for the putt-putt of the engine and the buzz of the saw, but I couldn't hear it, and I says to Catty, "Sounds kind of still, don't it?"

He cocked his ear and kind of scowled. "Wonder what's wrong," he says. "They're not working."

We hit the horse a larrup and he almost trotted. If he had gone twice as fast as he was going he'd have been going about half as fast as a regular horse. But he got there. You could always say that. If you gave him time enough, he'd take you where you wanted to go.

We jumped out and ran through the woods to the clearing where the saw was set up, and there it was, and it wasn't buzzing a buzz. Mr. Print was sitting alongside of it, looking sort of

sour, and there was a big heap of wood, sawed to stove length, just behind him—all they had cut in a week, and it was a pretty good mess.

"What's the matter?" says I.

Mr. Print grunted.

"Toop kid," says he.

"What's he been up to?"

"Hired all our men away. Give 'em each a half dollar a day more 'n we were, and they up and quit."

"But you didn't," says Catty.

"When I take a job, I take it," says Mr. Print. "When I make a bargain, why, I calc'late to stand by it, deep snow or flood water. So here I be, but I might 's well be in Jericho fer all the good I'm doin'."

"What was Toop's rush about getting more men?" says Catty.

"He didn't say, but I guess he was sore about not getting my saw off of me, and he done it to be mean. Looks like a kid that would git mean if a chance was give him."

"And maybe," says Catty, "he's boggled around and found out who it really was that bought all his wood. If he did, why then we've got to get a wiggle on us, because he'll be delivering so fast we won't be able to pay."

"What'll we do?" says I.

"Get more men," says Catty.

"Where?"

"Wherever there's a man that will take a job," says Catty, "and I guess we better leave it up to Mr. Print. He knows more about men and where to get them than we do. How about it, Mr. Print? Will you take on the job of getting us a new crew?"

"Bet your life," says Mr. Print. "If there's anythin' I kin do to put a spoke in that Toop kid's wheel, you kin count on me."

"Fine," says Catty. "Put on all the men you can use, and get an extra team for delivering if you can—maybe two. We want to rush things. . . . We're going to take a look to see how Toop's getting along with *his* work."

"Drop a monkey wrench in his machinery," says Mr. Print kind of savage-like.

We piled into our wagon again and drove out toward the lake. We had business there with our route anyhow, and while we were at it we could get a line on Toop's stove-wood operation, which we did. His saw was buzzing like all git out, and a gang of men were working all over the place, chopping and clearing and swamping, and hauling to the saw. More men were piling, and getting the wood in shape to load. I felt my stomach turn over twice when I saw how

much they had cut. If I was any guesser at all, they had close to a hundred cords. It was a lot, and if we had to raise the money to pay for even that much—why, we just naturally couldn't.

For a while we snooped around, and saw all there was to see. Then Catty says, "Well, there's nothing else to be done. Let's see if we can get to the cave after Pawky's box."

"'Twon't be safe," says I, "because somebody was driving along behind us as we came, and I'll bet I know who it was."

"Sure," says Catty. "It was one of them, all right, but we've fooled them before, and we ought to be able to fool them again."

"The time's coming," says I, "when the fooling will get on the wrong foot."

"Can't be helped," says he.

"Dad says the pitcher that goes to the well too often is bound to get smashed."

"Well," says he, "it has a lot more fun than the pitcher that never gets moved off the shelf." And I guess there was something in that.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

"THE thing to make sure of before we head in for the cave," says Catty, "is that we aren't being followed."

"But we are being," says I. "I told you I saw somebody."

"Anyhow," he says, "it's safest to act as if we knew we were. We'll go up the road a piece and turn off and wait. Then if somebody comes along, we'll see them."

So that's what we did. We pulled off the road and sat there for fifteen minutes. Nothing happened and nobody came along, so we made up our minds it was safe, and started off for the cave. On the way over Catty had us make believe we were scouts in an Indian country and that there were savages behind every other tree. About half the time he had us crawling along on our stomachs, and squirming through underbrush, and getting all mussed up for no reason at all—not that I mind getting mussed up, but I hate the hard work of it.

In that way we passed the old lighthouse where Pawky had been hidden and came to the

cave. Before we went in we did a lot more crawling around in circles and hiding our trail, because Catty said the Indians didn't know about the cave, and we would be safe in there unless they saw us go in—but if they saw us go in, why, our goose was cooked good and plenty, and our scalps would be hanging on the big chief's back fence. At last we got to it, and it seemed to me that not even a chipmunk could have seen us. Maybe a chipmunk didn't—but there are other things beside chipmunks.

"Now," says Catty, "we'll wait for a few minutes more—just for the sake of the extra precaution, and then we'll dig out the box and beat it for home."

"Seems to me we've used up all the precaution we got in stock," says I. "I know I'm all out of it."

"Well, I've got some left," he says, kind of short, "so we'll use up mine."

We sat down on the floor and waited, not saying a word, and I counted, just to see how long Catty would go on with his monkey business. I counted and counted and counted, and was just getting to nine hundred and ninety-six when a lot of gravel and stuff began to slide down in front of the cave off the hillside, and then came a pair of legs past the open-

ing and a man dropped kerplunk right at the door!

"There," says Catty in a whisper. "It's the last extra precaution that does the trick."

"We'd 'a' had it and been gone," I says right back to him.

"Yes, and been followed up, too," he says.

Then we sat quiet, hoping maybe the man wouldn't see the cave, but you might as well expect anybody not to see a hen light on the end of his nose. The man stood a minute, and then he ducked his head and came in. It was the biggest one of Mr. Toop's snoopers.

"Howdy," says he. "I kind of thought if I watched you kids long enough you'd show me something."

"Good for you," says Catty. "I kind of thought we got here without being seen."

The man laughed. "I was up on the hill watching you with these," and he showed us a pair of binoculars. "You sure done a lot of wrigglin' around. Nice little cave you got here. Is this all there is to it, or is there another room somewheres?"

"This," says Catty, "is the whole layout."

"Somehow," says the man, "I don't believe you. I've got an idea there 's an opening and another room big enough to hold a man. And

I've got the idea there's a man in it by the name of Pawky."

Catty grinned. "Hope you're right," he says. "We'd like this cave if it was bigger, and if you can find another room we'll be much obliged to you."

"I'll find it, all right," says the man, and with that he began snooping around and prying around, but in about five minutes he saw there wasn't any other room to be found, and he looked mighty disappointed.

"Say," he says, "what you kids doing here, anyhow? There isn't any place for Pawky to hide. Or is he going to meet you here?"

"Who?" says Catty.

"Mr. Pawky."

"No Mr. Pawky's going to meet us here."

"Then what are you here for?"

"Playing Indian," says Catty. "We're hiding from the redskins. . . . Say, Wee-wee, we can pretend this gentleman is an Indian spy that's discovered our hiding place. That'll make the game a lot more interesting."

"You can't fool me," says the man, "you're here for something more than playin' a silly game. No, sir. I've watched you kids, and I know that when you do a thing there's some reason behind it."

"Like prowling around in strawberry patches," says Catty with a grin.

"Huh," says the man, "so you were behind that, were you? Pretty good, for kids. Well, I don't hold any grudge. But what I want to know is what you're doing here—and I'm going to find out."

"Go ahead," says Catty. "You're welcome to keep on looking."

"You're going to tell me," says the man.

"Let's see—this is Thursday," says Catty, "and we never tell things on Thursday."

"You're mixing in an affair that's none of your business," says the man, "and you're bound to get into trouble."

"Trouble," says Catty, "it what we eat for breakfast food every morning."

"Where's Pawky?"

"I wish I could tell you. Really, I'd like to be able to, and save you all this hard work of looking for him."

The man sat down and lighted his pipe and thought about it. He had his mind made up we were there for something, and that he ought to find out about it, and he was trying to figure things out. I guess he was a slow thinker, but after a while he got an idea.

"Maybe," says he, "you've got something hid in this cave, and you've come to get it."

"You never can tell," says Catty.

"And maybe it's something that belongs to Mr. Pawky."

"Well," says Catty, "for a guesser, you always guess what you'd like to have happen. Here's the cave. It's free as air. Help yourself."

"I'm going to," says he, and he started in again to paw all around, but it didn't do him a bit of good. He pawed everywhere except where the box was hidden. After a while he got discouraged, and sat down again.

"Now," says he, "I hate to be disagreeable, but I'm going to sit right here until you boys tell me what I want to know. I don't believe anybody knows where you are, and I'll bet you'll be getting hungry by supper time. Now, then, how about it?"

"Sorry to disappoint you," says Catty.

"You admit you know where Pawky is?" says he.

Catty looked at me, kind of surprised. "I didn't hear you admit anything like that," says he. "Did you hear me?"

"No," says I. "I guess this gentleman must have made a mistake."

"Well, one mistake I'm not going to make is to let you get away from me before you do tell," says he.

"He likes jails," Catty says to me.

"If I get into one Mr. Toop 'll get me out," says the man.

"Good for him," says Catty, "but what if he gets into one himself?"

"Say," I says, "what's the idea? What is everybody looking for this man Pawky for?"

"Everybody isn't," says the man.

"Quite a lot of folks are," says Catty.

"What d'ye mean?" says the man.

"What 'll you give me if I'll tell you something interesting?"

"I'll let you go home."

"Much obliged for nothing. We just came away from home. But, just to kind of get you excited, what would you say if I told you there was a man in town who was an officer of the Universal Electric Company, and that *he* was looking all over for this Mr. Pawky you talk so much about."

"What's that? What's that?"

"Mind," says Catty. "I didn't *say* there was such a man. I just asked you what you'd think of it if there was."

"Um. . . ." says the man.

"I'll bet," says Catty, "that Mr. Toop would want to know about it right off, wouldn't he?"

"Say, where'd you see this Electric feller?"

"Didn't say I saw him. . . . With all the men Toop's got parading around the country, you'd think they'd have noticed a stranger like that, wouldn't you?"

"Somebody," says the man, "is going to ketch what for—and I hope it isn't me."

"You'd better go see about it," says Catty.

The man looked at him kind of suspicious. "You're awful anxious to get me out of this place, ain't you?"

"Well," says Catty, "we didn't invite you here, you know. If we'd wanted you, we'd have asked you to come."

"I don't believe there was any man like you said."

"I didn't say. I just asked. . . . Anyhow, what good is it going to do you to keep us here?"

"I'm going to keep you right here until you tell me where Pawky is, or where that mess of contraptions of his is."

"Wee-wee," says Catty to me, "we've got important business to look after. Every minute counts with us now. We can't afford to stay here."

"Looks like we couldn't help ourselves," says I.

"It's all right," says Catty, "to keep on looking after somebody else's interests, but when it comes to a point where you can't do it any more without getting into a mess yourself—why, you've got to look after yourself."

I couldn't get the idea. It sounded as if Catty was wanting to give in, and turn Pawky over to the enemy. But I couldn't believe that. It wasn't like Catty. Why, he was the kind of fellow who would stick a thing through and be true to his friends if somebody started to pick off his legs one by one.

"What are you talking about?" says I.

"Business," says he.

"Now you're talking, young fellow," says the man.

"But," says I, "you don't mean—you don't honestly mean you're wanting to turn traitor to Pawky?"

"I'm not wanting to," says he, "but look at our stove-wood deal, and how it's needing us this minute, and how Pawky has interfered right along. We ought to give every second of our time to it. We don't owe Pawky anything, and we've done more for him than he has any right to expect."

"It don't make any difference," says I, getting kind of mad. "We're in the thing, and we can't get out—not and be decent."

"Well," he says, like he was kind of ashamed, "you can do what you like, but there's too much money going to be lost for me to go and be foolish. I'm going to tell."

"Catty Atkins," says I, "I've stuck to you through thick and thin, but if you go and do such a thing as this, I'll never speak to you again as long as I live."

"Oh," says he, "you won't feel that way about it when you think it over." And with that he turned to the man and says, "You'll let us go if we tell you where we hid that box with Pawky's invention in it?"

"You bet," he says.

"Well," says Catty, and he didn't let me catch his eye, "just go over there to your right. See that stone that looks as if it was a part of the cave wall? Behind that is a little shelf, and that's where we hid the box."

"Catty Atkins!" says I, and I thought I'd start right in to bawl. It was about the worst thing I ever heard of. I wouldn't have believed he could be so low down as to do it.

The man rushed over to the spot where we had hid the box and began working at the

stone. I saw Catty edge toward the door, and he motioned to me to come, but I wouldn't. I made up my mind I'd stay there till I starved to death, I was so ashamed, and I had a kind of an idea that maybe I could fight the man, or grab the box and run, or something like that. Catty kept on motioning hard, but I wouldn't move, and then he disappeared. He just ducked and ran. I felt pretty scared, but I was bound I was going to do something.

The man got the stone loose, and I sneaked over behind him. He shoved his arm into the hole, and I looked, ready to grab. But I pretty nearly keeled over. That hiding place where we had put the box was empty. There wasn't a thing in it. . . . I just had sense enough left to turn and run like the mischief out of the cave.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

AS I got out on the hillside I heard the man let out a yell, and that didn't make me go any slower. I had just one piece of business to attend to then, and that was to get as much distance between me and that spot as there was, and it didn't look like there was enough distance in the world to satisfy me.

I stumbled and tumbled and scratched myself all up, but I kept going, and after a while I got to the wagon and there was Catty sitting up on the seat as big as life and twice as natural.

"Hello," says he.

"You drive right along," says I, "I'm going to walk."

"What's the idea?" says Catty.

"Why," says I, "you and I are through. I don't ride with or talk to a fellow that gives away folks that trust him."

"Don't blame you a bit," says Catty. "What did Mister Man do when he found the box? Kiss you?"

"No," says I, "he didn't kiss me."

"Well, what *did* he do?"

"I didn't wait to see," says I.

"Um. . . . I kind of depended on you to stay and take the box away from him," says Catty. "I thought of course you'd step right up and grab it."

"I would have," says I, "or anyhow I'd have tried."

"Why didn't you?"

"Because," says I, "there wasn't any box there."

"No! There wasn't any box there, eh? Then it looks like I wasn't such a traitor after all."

"You meant to be," says I.

"Well," he says, "there's something in that."

"Drive along," says I.

"It's easier to ride than walk."

"Not with you," says I. "I'd rather crawl."

"Um. . . ." says he, "two wrongs don't make a right. Just because I've done something you think is mean doesn't make a good reason for you to throw me down when I'm needing you in the business. Besides, you've got as much in it as I have."

"You can have it," says I.

"Can I have what we'll owe if we go bust?"

Well, I had to kind of stop and think over that, and I did, and when I'd thought a while I says, "All right. I'll stick till this deal is over

one way or another. But it's just business. I don't want anything to do with you that I don't have to."

"Fine," says he. "But that don't stop me from talking to you, does it? If I get lonesome and want to tell you what a fine day it is, I can do that, can't I? You know I have to talk some, and just by accident I might let something slip out that wasn't strictly business. You wouldn't hold that up against me, would you?"

"I'll say this," says I, "you don't seem very much ashamed of yourself."

"People have different ways of being ashamed," says he. "Climb up and we'll begin to do business and nothing else. But first, we'd better hustle, because Mister Man may be coming along, and I'll bet his disposition is all ruined to pieces."

I climbed on and we started off, but I felt pretty rotten, I can tell you. Catty didn't say anything for a while and I didn't look at him. Then he says, "The thing we've got to get right busy with is young Toop's five hundred cords of wood. That's the one thing we've got to take care of."

"And getting men to work for us."

"That," says Catty, "has been taken care of by this time."

"What if young Toop found out we were buying his wood?" says I.

"He'd cut some kind of caper," says Catty. "But he mustn't find out. If we could only deliver that much wood of our own before he starts to deliver to us."

"Yes," says I, "but that would only put off the trouble. We've sold every cord of wood this town will take, so far as I can see, and we'd only end up by having all Toop's wood left on our hands, and a lot of money to pay besides."

"We'll find a way out," says he.

"Somehow," I says, "I don't care much whether we do or not." And after that we didn't talk a great deal until we got to town, and we didn't talk much then. I kept wondering if Mr. Print had another crew at work, but Catty didn't seem to be worried any about that, so I let it go.

"We'd better go over the books of the company and find out where we stand," says Catty, "and how much cash we've got and how many orders for wood, and everything."

"I guess I know pretty well," says I.

"Well, maybe so," he says. "Starting with the rowboat deal and working down through pop corn and grocery route and the hardware venture and cutting lawns and all, we've aver-

aged up pretty well. Yes, sir, I think we've done pretty good."

He wanted to talk about it, and be kind of proud and all that, and I would have wanted to do the same thing the day before, but right now I didn't care. I didn't want to be proud of anything, or to talk about anything. What I wanted to do was to go off some place and hide and never see anybody again. You know, when you've had a lot of trust in a person, and always believed that person was about the best in the world, and you've admired them and been with them all the time, and then, without a bit of warning, that person goes and turns out to be different than you thought, and yellow and a traitor, why, it comes pretty close to kicking over your bucket of sap. It seemed to me like I'd never take any interest in life again, or ever trust a living soul. The worst of it was that Catty didn't seem to care. He just went along like he always does, and didn't look ashamed and didn't make any excuses or anything. That kind of hurt. If only he'd been a little sorry. But he wasn't. He acted just as if nothing had happened at all.

"Let's go over to the wood yard," says he. "Lant Parsons must have made the deal for us with Toop by this time. Well, if we can get

away with it, it'll be all right. Half of his commission besides what profit we can make on the resale."

So over we went and there was Lant. "Been waitin' for you kids to show up," says he.

"Why?"

"On account of that deal you was talkin' up with me t'other day, with the Toop boy."

"Yes," says Catty.

"Wa-al, I had a kind of a talk with him."

"What'd he say?"

"He says consid'able, he does. That's one of the talkin'est, gabbiest kids I ever seen, but he's sharp. He wanted I should tell him if I was buyin' the wood myself, or if I was actin' for somebody else."

"And what did you say?"

"I told him I was actin'."

Catty waggled his head, but he didn't say a word. "And then what did he say?" I asked.

"He wanted to know who I was actin' fer."

"But you didn't tell him."

"Not right off," says Lant.

"But you told him," says Catty. "You went and told him. Didn't I warn you special, Lant? Didn't I tell you this was a secret and the deal would fall through if he found out we were in it?"

"I calc'late you did," says Lant, "but I kind of lost sight of it, he talked so much. And then he asked right out if it was you, and I says it was."

"Then what?"

"He says the deal was off."

"Of course he did, but did he say what he was going to do?"

"No, but he looked tickled to death."

"Sure, and right after that he went and hired all our men, and now he'll be up to something, you can bet on that. Wee-wee, we're in for hard trouble."

"What d'you suppose he'll do?" says I.

"I don't know, but I do know we won't like it. We won't care for it any more'n we would for kerosene on our potatoes."

"Anyhow," says I, "we don't have to raise all that money to buy it."

"Whatever happens now 'll be worse than that. Gosh, I wish I could make a guess, and then maybe we could sort of get up a defense against it."

"It seems to me," says I, "we're doin' a lot of worrying about what Toop can do to us. Isn't he doing any worrying about what we can do to him?"

Catty looked at me a minute and grinned.

"He doesn't have to worry, because he's safe, whatever happens. But we've got to hold up the market. You and I have got to make money, and he hasn't. He can step out and sell for any price he wants to, so long as he gets back the cost of his labor. No, you and I are all the folks there are who have to worry."

"But can't we *make* him worry?"

"How?"

"No idea," says I, "but we ought to think about it, and get up some kind of a scheme to make him protect himself instead of going out to get us."

"It's a good notion," says Catty, "but I don't see how it can be done. As the financial papers say, his position is secure."

"Well," says I, "if I meet him his nose won't be. It'll be mighty insecure."

"What I want to do," he says, "is start to deliver wood. We've got a lot cut, and the sooner we deliver it and get our money, the better off we're going to be."

"Sounds good," says I, "but how?"

"Hire more men and teams," he says, "and get them on the job. I'm going out now and hire every team and every kind of a wagon I can, and to-morrow I'm going to start delivering so fast the air will be full of stove wood."

"How much have we got cut?"

"I don't know, but it ought to be a couple of hundred cords, anyhow. Not all split into stove size, but a lot of our orders are for chunks anyhow."

"Then," says I, "let's get at it."

"Make a list of men who've got teams," says he, "and we'll divide it, and hire as many of 'em as we can."

"Then we'd better go to the office where we can work," says I. Which is what we did. We got a paper and made out a list of men in town who had horses and wagons, and there were about a dozen, but we knew we couldn't get them all. When we had our list we divided it up and went out to hire the men and teams.

"Start delivering the smallest orders first," says he. "It'll be easier to get the money."

"Fine," says I.

We didn't get any supper that night, but before we went to bed we'd hired seven teams to be on the job early in the morning, and if Toop didn't turn up something before the next night we'd be so much ahead of him, anyhow. And that was something.

CHAPTER TWENTY

WELL, next morning at daylight we were out on the job, and so were the teams. Mr. Print had got a pretty good crew and the saw was buzzing along like a beehive and the wood was piling up again in a way that did my heart good. Or it would have done it good if I hadn't felt the way I did about Catty. I just couldn't get excited about anything. Catty was as chipper as a cricket, and he acted funny, too. He acted like he does when he's all filled up with some big idea, and is kind of stuck on himself because he's thought of it.

We worked that day, you can bet. We helped load, and then we rode into town, and, as fast as the men unloaded at the houses of our customers, we collected. But it takes a long time to deliver wood, even when you've quite a gang of men working. You can't work too many without having them get in each other's way, and a team that loaded and delivered and unloaded four cords of wood from our lot in a day was doing pretty well. With a couple of extra big trucks we'd managed to hire we delivered

more, so that by supper time we had got to town and collected for exactly thirty-three cords. That was something, but I would have liked to have seen it ten times as much.

Next day we started out the same way, and before folks were through with their breakfasts we had delivered our first mess of loads. My goodness, how we worked! My hands were as full of splinters as a quillpig is of quills. The men got kind of interested, too, and worked as hard as if it was their own job. The second loads were delivered and the teams back and loading again by ten o'clock. Just about then I looked up and saw Toop in his little runabout. He was out in the road watching with a kind of a satisfied look on his face, and when he saw that I saw him he laughed right out.

"What are you squawking about?" says I.

"Oh," says he, "you'll find out soon enough."

"If you go laughing at me," says I, "you'll find out something sooner than that."

"Going to buy all my wood and shut off competition, weren't you?" he says.

"What we were going to do," says I, "isn't any of your business."

"I made it my business," he says. "You two kids have been pretty snooty, and it's about

time you got taken down. And I'm the little elevator to do it. Way down to the basement."

"Listen to what's perched in the road," says I to Catty.

"I hear," he says, "what's it trying to say?"

"Guess it's talking hog Latin," says I, "I don't understand it very well."

"You will when you get to town," says Toop. "Read the paper. When you get there read a paper the first thing you do—and then take a look around."

"What I'd like to do," says I, "is fix you so you could look around the back of your own neck."

"Profiteers!" says he.

"What's that?" says I.

"Profiteers," he says again. "Taking advantage of your own friends. That's what you're doing. Just because they can't get coal you're selling them wood at outrageous prices."

"We're not," says I, "we're taking a reasonable profit."

"Haw! . . . Well, you won't take much more of it. I'm going to show this town that I'm a good friend of it. That's what I'm going to do. I'm not going to sit around and see honest people gouged by a couple of kid sharpers like you. You watch."

I started to walk toward him and I made up my mind that if he did any watching for a few days it would be with somebody else's eyes. You bet he would, for I was going to close up both of his, so that the butcher shop would have to work over time cutting steaks to put on to them. But he didn't wait. He just laughed and waggled his fingers at us and started his car. Toop wasn't the kind to stand around and fight. Before I got to the fence he was a quarter of a mile away.

"What d'you suppose he means?" says I to Catty.

"I don't know," says he.

"We'd better get there and find out," I says.

"These loads are pretty nearly loaded. Then we'll go in," he says.

It wasn't more than fifteen minutes before we left on the first load, and it seemed to me that was the longest and slowest ride I ever took. It seemed to me I could have walked to California in about half of the time. But we did get to town finally and jumped off the load and ran to the newspaper office. We both grabbed a paper and started to look through it, but it didn't take much looking. What we were trying to find was put where it could be found without any looking at all. It was the whole

back page of the paper, and when I saw it, I almost keeled over backward. It was an advertisement, and that advertisement just knocked the props from under us in a way that was enough to make you sick to your stummick.

"Don't be gouged by profiteers," it says in big, black letters. "Don't pay more than you have to." Then there was some smaller print, but just below it, in the biggest letters the paper had, was the words "Stove wood." And then it says: "The coal shortage is the profiteers' opportunity. You must have stove wood because you can't have coal. But stove wood doesn't cost more than it always did. Why should a strike in the coal mines raise the price of wood which grows at your door?" And then there was a lot about how Toop was prepared to sell stove wood at cost, just because he loved the people so, and hated to see anybody done out of their hard-earned money, and it ended by saying that he would sell wood for four dollars a cord as long as it lasted, beginning the next day at ten o'clock.

"Well," says I, "now what d'you think?"

"I think," he says, "that it might be worse."

"It might be true. We might really be profiteers. We might be gouging folks, but we aren't. We are really doing something for

them, and at a profit that's only fair and just. If we hadn't gone into the wood business in a wholesale way, most folks wouldn't have been able to get any at all, and they couldn't get coal, and there would have been a bad time all around. But we saw the chance, and it was a fair, decent chance to make reasonable money. Now here comes Toop, and, just because he wants to put it on our eye, he sells what doesn't cost him a cent, for less than we can afford to sell for. It isn't fair, but it makes us look like a couple of gougers. But we're not."

"Nobody'll ever believe it."

"It doesn't matter a bit what people believe, so long as you know you're right," he says.

"But," says I, "so far as our pocketbooks are concerned, it matters a lot. We'll never sell another cord of wood."

"Serve them right if we didn't," says he. "It would be all right anyhow if we could afford to wait, because people have got to have wood this winter, and we've got it to sell. But we can't wait. Wages and cost is going right on."

In about ten minutes we met one of our teams in the street and the driver stopped and says, "The folks where I was to deliver this wood wouldn't take it."

"Why?"

"They said they were being cheated."

"Fine," says Catty, "take it up to my house." Then he turned to me and says, "all the loads that are refused we can deliver to your house or mine, and then we won't be out anything for the work."

"Sure," says I, "but what about the other hundreds and hundreds of cords?"

"Well," he says, "we can quit right now and not lose more than our whole summer's work has earned us. We can pay for everything, and just about break even."

"What?" says I, "not throw away all the hard work we've done since school was out?"

"Yes," says he, "we can do that."

"I won't," says I.

"But," says he, "how can we go on? Folks won't buy our wood."

"There's some way," I says, "and we've got to find it. I won't quit. I tell you I won't quit. No, sir. That Toop kid can't go around all the rest of his life bragging about how he licked us."

"Good for you, Wee-wee," says Catty. "I just wanted to know how you felt about it. I'm with you, and we'll stick until they get maple sap out of the iron fence posts."

"You bet," says I.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

IT was a puzzle, and I'm not good at figuring out puzzles. Anybody with half an eye could see that folks wouldn't buy wood from Catty and me for five dollars when they could get it from Toop for four dollars. And, when they had got it into their heads that four dollars was the right price, they wouldn't want to pay five no matter what happend. And there we were. Of course, Toop couldn't supply a quarter of the wood the town had to have, but he was supplying it quick, and he had spoiled our market. We had to have money coming in all the time to pay off the men who were working for us, and, of course, none was coming in. It looked to me like we would not only not make a penny, but would lose every cent we *had* made in our other investments all summer.

"Well," I says to myself, "Toop's wood may catch fire or something, and that'll help. If it burned up, folks couldn't buy it."

Which was true, but it wasn't going to burn up, not then. Where it would burn would be in the stoves of folks we had expected to sell

our own wood to, and who had actually ordered wood from us. We had discovered the market and worked it up, and then along comes this kid and just spoils it to be mean.

I hunted up Catty, not that I wanted to see him, because I felt as if I never wanted to see him again after his turning traitor to Pawky, but because business made it necessary for me to see him. He was sitting in our office whistling to himself and writing on a piece of paper. When I came in he looked up, but he didn't say a word and went right on writing again as if I hadn't come in at all.

"Well?" says I.

"Um. . . ." says he. "Honesty is the best policy."

"Maybe," says I, "but what's that got to do with the present price of stove wood?"

"A lot, possibly," says he.

"How a lot?" says I.

"Well," he says, "you never can tell what funny things happen on account of telling the truth."

"I guess," I says, "you must be off your trolley."

"No," he says, "but a current 's beginning to run through my trolley wire."

"What kind of a current?" says I.

"Of common sense," he says.

"It's time," I says kind of short.

"We agree on that," he says kind of dry.

"But that doesn't sell stove wood," says I.

"It may," says he. "If we tell enough truth and tell it hard enough."

"I'm willing to tell all I know," I says.

He tore off a piece of paper and handed it to me with a grin. "Honest?" he says. "All you know? Well, write it on that and be sure you leave a wide margin."

I could have poked him one in the eye, but I couldn't see what good that would do, so I just says, "You think you're kind of smart, to-day."

"I hope I am," says he. "One of us has got to be smart or our soup 'll be spilled."

"If you've got any kind of a scheme," says I, "why, out with it and don't talk so much foolishness."

"I have," he says, "and maybe it'll work and maybe it won't. But here's what there is of it, and as I said, it's nothing but telling the truth. I'm going to advertise in the paper like Toop did and tell folks all about the stove wood business and how much profit we make and why they ought to buy stove wood—and I've got a little joker to stick on the end of it if it doesn't work without."

"What kind of a joker?"

"The kind," he says, "that a bumblebee carries in his pants pocket."

I knew there was no use asking him any more, because he is that set in his way and that fond of himself that he just won't tell anything until he thinks the right moment for telling has come—I mean the moment when the thing he tells will sound biggest and make him look the smartest. He likes to be It with a big I, and I don't know that I blame him so much for that. In a minute he says:

"What I'm going to tell the people is this. I'm going to tell them what I know about coal. I know that there won't be a ton of coal per family in town this winter. Nobody knows when any coal will come. I've found that out. Coal can't be gotten. That's the truth, and I'm going to tell it to everybody, so they'll be sure to know it and to think about it."

"Yes," says I, "and what then?"

"I'm going to tell them that if they want to cook and keep warm till spring they'll have to have stove wood."

"Sure, so they'll buy it of Toop."

"Maybe," he says.

"We don't want to sell his wood."

"Not exactly. But he's selling it. Five hun-

dred cords of it. And that's all he's got. I'm going to tell the folks just how much he's got, and that it don't amount to a cord a house for this town. See? He can't supply everybody, can he? Well, I'll prove to them that Toop can give them only a fraction of the wood they've got to have, and I'll explain why he can sell it cheap."

"Yes," says I.

"And then I'll tell them about us, and how many cords we can supply, and how much we have got to charge for it, and about what we figure our profit will be. We're in this to do legitimate business and make a legitimate profit, and no sensible person can object to that. I'm going to tell the whole truth, and I'm going to say that we can supply everybody who wants wood and at a reasonable price. I'm going to show them that nobody else can supply them, and that they've got to buy from us sooner or later."

"Maybe they won't believe it."

"I'll prove it," says he.

"I don't think much of the scheme," says I. "Can't you think up something smart?"

"There's times when the smartest thing in the world is just straightforward dealing," says he. "There's times when there's nothing so

clever as just to tell folks exactly what you are up to and why you're up to it. I don't know but it's the best plan all the time."

"Is that why you told that man where Pawky's invention was hidden in the cave?" says I.

He didn't get mad; he just looked at me and sort of smiled, and it was mighty aggravating, I can tell you.

"Well," I says, "we're in a tight corner where we've got to do something, and if this is the best you can think of, why we'll have to try it."

"It'll do for a start," he says, "but I've still got Toop on my mind. I'd like to play around with him sort of kind and gentle."

"Get busy with your advertising," says I.

"We've got to have money Saturday to pay off our help," he says, "and advertising won't get it in time. We've got to sell some wood."

"We've got to sell something, or do something, or something," says I, "and," I says, "how's Pawky? I haven't seen him to-day."

"He's happy," says Catty. "He's rigging up some kind of a jiggeroon with dangledoos on it, and you could shout in his ear without ever disturbing him."

"We've got to do something about him," says I.

"We have," says Catty. "Can't have him around under foot much longer. He's a nuisance. Interferes with business."

"Why," says I, "don't you just tell Toop we've got him here? That would get him out of the road."

"I've thought of that," says he, "but somehow I just don't feel quite in the humor to do it—yet."

"You mean you may feel in the humor?" I asked.

"I rather think I shall," he says. "When I do I'll let you know, so you can be around to see the fun."

Well, I was that disgusted I could hardly speak. To think I had been chumming around all these years with Catty Atkins, and looking up to him and thinking he was the finest fellow on earth, and now to have him turn out to be what I could see he was. It just didn't seem possible, but there it was, as plain as the nose on your face. I couldn't even speak for a while, but when I could speak I said—and I meant every word of it, "Catty Atkins," says I, "if you ever get so low down and so mean that you give Pawky away to Toop, I'm going to take you out behind my dad's barn and I'm going to lick you till you can't walk. And that's that."

"Good for you," says he. "I guess you must be quite a scrapper."

"I'm enough of one to do that," I says, "and I'll show you."

"Well, I sha'n't do it for maybe a day or two," he says, "so you can be exercising your muscle during that time, and getting in training. I'll bet," he says, "that it'll be quite a fight."

"You're trying to make fun of me," I says, "but this isn't a good time to do it. You go along about your business and I'll train along with you till this deal is through. Then I never want to see or hear of you again."

"Wee-wee," says he, "you've got an awful unfeeling nature. You're harsh and cruel. Oh, Wee-wee, can't you forgive and forget?" And then he laughed so hearty he almost fell out of his chair. I took one step toward him with my fists all ready, but then I stopped. I would thrash him when the time came, but it wasn't the time then. No, sir. We couldn't afford a fight now, with all our business to look after. So I just undoubled my fists and grabbed hold of the seat of my pants with both hands and hung on, so my knuckles wouldn't fly at him when I didn't want them to.

"That 'll be all for to-day," I says. "Let's get

to work and do what's got to be done. This trouble between us can be taken care of afterward."

"And it will be, Wee-wee, don't worry," says Catty.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

WELL, Catty got to work on his advertisements, and they came out in the paper. When folks saw them and read them there was a lot of talk, but nothing much happened, and Catty and I felt kind of discouraged. At any rate, I did. Catty wouldn't let on if he was discouraged. But next day, without saying a word to me, he came out with another advertisement, which wasn't exactly an advertisement at all. It was just two telegrams, printed in big type. The first one was signed Atkins and Moore, which was Catty and me, and it was to the Wattrous Coal and Wood Company in the city. It read:

"How much will you offer for two thousand cords first-class beech and maple stove wood, FOB this town?"

The answer, printed right under it, said:

"Will give four-fifty a cord if immediate delivery is guaranteed. Signed, Wattrous Coal and Wood Company."

And under this Catty said to the folks, "If

you want wood for this winter, get your order in within twelve hours."

That was all, not another word. Well, I almost had a cat fit. Somehow I'd never dreamed of trying to sell our wood out of town. It never occurred to me we could do business in foreign parts, as you might say, but you could depend on Catty to think of everything. There was two thousand cords as good as sold. Of course we lost fifty cents a cord profit, but there would be enough left—if only we could deliver the wood. But to deliver it we had to have money to pay our men and we couldn't get the money until we sold the wood. So there we were again.

But I guess that second advertisement kind of scared folks, for the first thing in the morning there were two men in our office and each of them wanted twenty-five cords.

"The price," says one of them, "is four-fifty, like the paper said."

"The price," says Catty, "is five dollars, like we sold it to you before. If you take two thousand cords, we can make it to you for four-fifty. But not a cent less on retail orders."

"I won't pay five," says the man.

"Then," says Catty, "we can't do business. Good morning, sir."

"But I've got to have wood," says the man. "I can't get coal."

"That's so," says Catty, "but our price is five dollars. Maybe you can get it cheaper some place else."

"You know very well I can't," says the man. He kind of scowled, and then he pulled out his pocket book and counted out a hundred and twenty-five dollars. "I'm paying in advance," says he, "so I'll be sure to get my wood delivered right off."

Well, that was that. The other man didn't say a word, but just made out his check for a hundred and twenty-five, which made two hundred and fifty together, and we didn't need to worry for a day or two. Before the day was over we had taken back orders for a whaling lot of wood, and it looked as if everything was all right again, but Catty was ambitious.

"We ought to find out some way to take care of that Wattrous Coal Company," he says. "Two thousand cords is a lot, and it would be a lot of profit. I wonder if we can't manage it?"

"No," says I, "we've got our hands full."

"If we had another saw and twice as many men," says he.

"Where'd we get it?"

"Well, there *is* another saw, and there are more men. As long as there are things, why we can get them. Now there's Toop's saw and his crew. He must be pretty nearly through with them."

"But he wouldn't sell us his saw," says I.

"He won't keep it for a souvenir," says Catty.

"Try to buy it and see," says I.

"I'm going to," he says, and with that he went out of the office, and I didn't see him again until night. When he came back he was grinning like a Cheshire cat, whatever that is, and went and sat down and pretended nothing had happened, just to aggravate me. I stood it as long as I could and then I says, "Well, what you been up to now?"

"Nothing much," says he.

"Did you buy that saw?" says I.

"I did," says he.

"From Toop's father," says he.

"How'd you manage that?"

"Just went to him and says, 'Hear you have a buzz saw for sale.' "

"What 'd he say?"

"He says his son had one that he was through with, and he guessed it was for sale, and I

asked how much, and he told me what it cost and I offered him half, and told him the saw wouldn't ever be any good to him any more. Well, we haggled some, but in the end I got it, and it's out on our lot all set up and sawing wood, and we've six more men at work and two more teams, and two flat cars are ordered in and to-morrow we begin delivering to the Wattrous Coal and Wood Company. And that," says he, "is a pretty fair day's work."

"Huh," says I, "it don't sound very hard."

"It wasn't," says he. "Lots of things aren't hard. All it takes it just sense enough to think them up and nerve enough to do them. I've wired the Wattrous people deliveries would begin at once, C. O. D."

"And we're out of that pickle," says I. "Well, I never thought we would be, and it doesn't seem possible we are. It was too easy."

"But," says he, "there are a lot of folks who wouldn't have got out of it, no matter how easy it was."

"And I'm one of them, I suppose."

"Oh, I don't know. You're quite bright every now and then."

"Huh. . . . So now we've got to deliver four thousand cords instead of two?"

"You bet."

"I can see us doing it," says I.

"You'll see more when I get about ten more men to work to-morrow. I've got 'em, too."

That was all right. But, I said to myself, there'll be a lot more water passing under the bridge before we have the money safe in the bank. And there was.

Just then I turned around, and there, standing in our door, was Mr. Toop's hired man—the one who had caught us in the cave, and the one Catty told where Pawky's box was.

"Good morning," says he, kind of sour. "Thought I'd drop in to see you."

"Always glad to have visitors," says Catty. "What can we do for you?"

"You can tell me what you boys are acting so suspicious about, that's what you can do. You fooled me the other day out at that cave of yours, but you won't fool me again. I mean business. We've been watching you pretty careful, and we know you are helping this fellow Pawky. We know you know where he is. We know you have been buying food for him and taking it to where he's hid. Now, you'd better come through and tell what you know."

"I've been kind of thinking that over," says Catty.

"Then go ahead," says the man.

"But," says Catty, "this man Pawky seems kind of valuable, and folks don't give away valuable things."

"Catty Atkins!" says I.

"Shut up, Wee-wee, I'm managing this," he says.

"And I don't like the way you're doing it," says I.

"Well," says the man, "do I understand you're willing to make a deal?"

"You don't understand anything," says Catty. "We don't even admit we know this Pawky. But you can bet, if we do know him, we're not going to give him away just for fun, and we're going to know more about the whole business. There must be a lot of money in it."

"Oh, not so much," says the man. "He just knows something Mr. Toop wants to find out."

"Such as what?" says Catty.

"Just a business secret," says the man.

"Um. . . . Well, I think it's a pretty valuable business secret, and I'm a business man. You go and tell Mr. Toop that I am, and that I do business in a businesslike way. If he

wants to buy anything from me, you say to him that he'd better come and make an offer before I sell to somebody else."

"Who else?"

"How should I know? If this secret is worth money to one man, it's worth money to another, and I'll find him."

"What do you want?"

"I don't know exactly," says Catty. "I don't even know that I've got anything to sell. But if I have, I'll deal with Mr. Toop direct. You tell him that. Tell him we might know something and we might not. But if we do, and he's willing to take a chance on it, he'd better drop around to talk."

"That's the best I get out of you, is it?"

"That," says Catty, "is the best."

"Then he'll be here, and you'd better be here to see him. And watch your step, young feller, watch your step."

"With both eyes," says Catty, and then the man went out. I could hardly wait for him to go before I burst out at Catty:

"Do you mean to say you're going to tell Mr. Toop where Mr. Pawky is?" I asked.

"Haven't made up my mind," says he, "but I think I shall. Anyhow, I shall if he doesn't find him before I get a chance."

"Then," says I, "I just want to tell you that I think you're too low down to live. You're low downer than I thought you were. I can't understand it, Catty. I can't understand it."

Honest, I felt like bellering, but I wouldn't let him see how bad I felt for a carload of ice cream soda So I just walked out.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

RIGHT then and there I made up my mind to one thing, and that was that it wouldn't do Catty any good to tell Mr. Toop where Pawky was, because I was going to rescue him and hide him myself, where nobody but I would know where he was. I wouldn't trust anybody, not a living soul. So I started out to plan what I would do and how I would do it. It was pretty hard, because, up to now, Catty had been the one who did the scheming, and I just came in when there was something to do. But I figured I'd had quite a lot of practice watching how his head worked, and so maybe I could make mine work the same way. It sounded a lot easier than it actually was, and after I had worked and schemed for hours, and had a sort of a plan made up, why it didn't sound so all-fired smart after all. But it was the best I could do, and you can't expect much more from a fellow than his best—if he's sure it is his best. Of course you never can tell what is your best until you're forced, but I was forced now.

Somehow I wasn't so much worried about

getting Pawky away from Toop and his men, as I was about sneaking him out of Catty's sight without Catty's catching on. I wondered if Catty had any idea what I had in mind, and then I decided it would be best to make believe he *knew*. If I went about it as if Catty knew what I was trying to do, then it would be all right. If he didn't know I'd get away with it, and if he did know I'd be ready for him.

The main thing was to get at it in a hustle, because Toop would be coming down to see Catty as soon as he could get there, which would be after dinner. So I sat down and thought, and then I had an idea. Now it isn't the easiest thing in the world to get a grown man out of town without anybody seeing him; but I thought of a way and you can believe I was pretty tickled with myself. Out in our yard was a big hogshead that something had been shipped in to dad. I figured I could roll that up on our wagon with its open end pointing to the back, and then I could hang a sort of curtain over that and back it up to the behind door of our office and sneak Pawky into it as slick as a mouse eating cheese. Then I could drive off, and nobody would notice a thing.

So I ate my dinner fast and got out the wagon, and rolled the hogshead up on some

boards and fixed it right at the stern of the wagon as handy as a bug in a rug. I fastened it there with ropes and made a kind of a curtain out of burlap. It was about as neat a job as I ever did. Then I started down town, driving by back ways and through alleys and hoping all the while I'd get there before Catty was back from his dinner. But I didn't have any luck. I backed up to the office as quiet as I could and then sneaked around to see what I could see. There was Catty inside sitting by the table we used for a desk, and he was figuring away at something as though his life depended on it.

I went in and went to the showcase and fiddled around, but I didn't speak to him. He didn't speak to me for a while either, and then he says, "I've got to go up to the hotel, Wee-wee," says he. "Will you stay here and mind the shop till I come back?"

"Yes," I says kind of short-like, and off he went.

"Be sure," he says, "that you don't leave till I come."

"I won't," says I.

"Because," he says, "I'm expecting somebody, and if anybody comes, tell them to wait."

I knew he meant Mr. Toop, and I was sore

as a boil, and I made up my mind that if that man did come snooping around while I was there I'd put a bur in his ear.

As soon as Catty got out I went into the back room, where Pawky was eating a sandwich with one hand while he tried to fasten a wire on to a jigger with the other. He didn't hear me come in because he was so interested in his job. Every once in a while he'd make a jab at his mouth with the sandwich, and sometimes he'd hit and sometimes he'd miss. Once he got his ear and a couple of times he stabbed his glasses, but it didn't seem to make a bit of difference. He was just as contented one place as another, it seemed.

"Mr. Pawky," says I, "I've come to help you escape."

"Don't bother me," says he. "I'm working out a problem."

"You'll be working out something worse than a problem," says I, "if you don't get your wits about you and gather up your stuff and come along with me. Toop 'll have you in half an hour if you don't."

"Where do you want me to go?" says he.

"Where you'll be safe for a while, anyhow," says I.

He sighed and commenced to pack up his

I GAVE HIM A LITTLE PUSH AND HE CRAWLED IN

trinkets, and finally he was ready. "Now what?" says he.

"I've got a slick way of getting you out of town," says I.

"What is it?" says he.

"Come cautious," says I "and I'll show you." So I took him to the back door and opened it as stealthily as I could, and showed him the hogshead. "There," says I, "what d'ye think of that?"

"I think," says he, "that it doesn't look very comfortable."

"What did you expect," says I "a Pullman car?"

"I didn't expect anything," he says, "only to be let alone. Why must I go riding around in dirty barrels? I don't like barrels. I never liked barrels. I never expect to like barrels."

"I'm sorry," says I, kind of sarcastic. "If I'd known you had a prejudice against barrels I'd have fetched a box or a potato sack. But into the barrel you go, just the same. It's not a barrel anyhow—it's a hogshead, and there's a lot of room and you can be as comfortable as a worm in an apple. In you go."

I gave him a little push and he crawled in, spluttering all the time and kicking up a row and making more noise than was safe.

Say," I says, "if you don't keep quiet you'll rouse the whole town, and if you make so much as a squeak after you're in and I start to drive you away, I'll come back there and just about step on your sore toe."

"I have no sore toe," says he.

"Then," says I. "I'll give you one. Now be still and wait a minute. Sit and think about something and enjoy yourself."

"I will," says he. "There is an interesting matter which will engage me for an hour."

"Fine. Make it last as long as it can," I told him. "But don't sneeze or cough, or give three cheers or kick the walls." Then I dropped the curtain and went back into the office and sat down.

Nobody came but Catty. He came back in twenty minutes, and as I looked up the street, there, just a ways behind him, came the smaller of the two men Toop had kept spying on us. That kind of interested me, and I looked all around to see what else I could see. Sure enough, about a hundred feet off, trying to hide behind some lilac bushes, was the big man.

"Huh," says I to myself, "business is picking up," and then I went back inside to wait for Catty and to see what would turn up. I was anxious to get away with Pawky, and yet I kind

of wanted to hang around in the vicinity to see what was going to happen.

In came Catty, looking like the cat that ate the canary, and saying nothing; and hardly had he got inside than in came the big man.

"Mr. Toop 'll be here in a minute," says he, "and you'd better stay right here to see him."

"I'm going to stay here all right," says Catty, "and not because Mr. Toop wants to see me. If it will give you any pleasure, you can tell Mr. Toop that this is my place of business and that I stay in it or leave it because I decide I want to."

That sounded more like the old Catty I used to know and I perked up for a second, but then I remembered how he'd turned traitor and I sagged back again to feeling the way I did before. The man scowled and said Catty was pretty fresh, and Catty answered him right back.

"Mister," he says, "I'm not fresh. If anybody's fresh it is you and Mr. Toop—always meddling with us and acting as though you owned the earth. Well, nobody owns the earth that I've heard of. Not this part of it, anyhow. So, if you want to do any business with me just reach down in your side pocket and pull out your manners and be polite about it.

Nobody around here is afraid of you. If the truth was told I shouldn't wonder but what you was kind of nervous yourself, because none of you act like men that was keeping right square inside of what you ought to do. Now, how if I was to go and get the sheriff and tell him this whole story? What then?"

The man didn't say anything back, and just walked to the door and looked up the street.

"Here comes Mr. Toop," says he.

I knew I ought to be getting along about my business then, but I couldn't bear to leave until I found out what Catty was up to, and what was going to happen. Somehow, even then, I hung on to a kind of a faint hope that Catty had been fooling me, and that the whole rotten business was some sharp scheme of his to get the best of Toop. And so I stayed, but I kept my ear cocked on the back door for any rumpus from Pawky.

Then Mr. Toop came in, as pompous as a three-layer cake with pink frosting on top of it, and says right off, as if he owned the place.

"Well, young man, I understand you have something to tell me?"

"Did somebody tell you that?" says Catty. "Because if he did, it wasn't the message I sent you."

"What was the message, then?" says Mr. Toop, short and stern.

"It was that if you wanted to talk business to me, why, I'd be here to talk it—and here I am."

"About this man Pawky?"

"What I remember saying was that I didn't admit I ever saw any Pawky. So let's start from there. I'm ready to talk business if you want to, but it's got to be the business I want to talk, and it's got to start from the place I want it to start from. If that's all right with you, why, we'll go ahead. If it isn't all right, then we'll call it a day and no harm done to anybody."

Mr. Toop sort of grinned at that, and it seemed to me he looked kind of admiring at Catty. "Go ahead," says he.

And then the big man spoke up. "Mr. Toop," says he, "I've been keeping an eye on these boys, and I've a first-class idea the man we want isn't many feet from here. Now, if you say so, I'll make a search, and then you won't have to take any of this kid's back talk."

Mr. Toop hesitated, and Catty got up and says, "Wee-wee, will you just step over for your dad and mine? Tell them a man is forcing his way around our office. Have them come right over."

"There, there," says Mr. Toop, "nobody's going to force anything."

"You can bet nobody is—around here," says Catty.

"Well, what do you want to talk about?" says Mr. Toop.

"I want to talk about stove wood," says Catty.

"Stove wood!"

"That very thing. You know Wee-wee and I are in the stove-wood business. We sat down and discovered how this town wasn't going to be able to get coal, and we turned to and arranged to supply it with wood. A good, fair, honest business proposition. We had orders all taken for about two thousand cords. Then somebody came in and told this town we were cheats and were overcharging folks and offered to sell wood a lot cheaper than we could. It busted our market and folks canceled our orders. We think it was a kind of a rotten thing to do. Now, this person has about five hundred cords all cut and ready to deliver. It won't supply the town, but it does mess up our business—and that's what I want to talk about."

"Oh," says Mr. Toop, "that's it, eh?"

"That's it. Now, you claim to be a fair busi-

ness man, and you've come here to make some kind of a deal with me, and with Wee-wee. Here's a deal you can make—you can sell me that stove wood, because, after all, it's yours and you furnished all the brains that went into it. I'm not asking you to lose any money, and I'm making you a fair offer. I'll pay you, or your son, whoever owns that wood, four dollars a cord for it. There's my proposition. You may take it or leave it."

"Stove wood is something I'm not interested in," says Mr. Toop. "It was something else you agreed to discuss with me."

"I'll talk about anything you want," says Catty, "*after* we're through talking stove wood."

"Oh," says Mr. Toop. "So that's it, eh?" He grinned, like he was kind of pleased with himself, and I could see in his eyes that he thought he was taking advantage of a boy who didn't know enough to make a real dicker. "If that's all that's standing between us and an understanding, I guess I can arrange about the wood."

"Guessing won't do," says Catty. "Nothing will do but this: You sit down and write out a bill of sale of that wood, and agree to take in payment for it a promissory note from me

and Wee-wee payable in thirty days. Then you deliver that bill of sale and take the note, and then the wood belongs to us. See? When that's done we'll go on and talk about anything in the world that you want to."

"That's easy," says Mr. Toop, and he sat down and wrote out the bill of sale, and Catty made out a note which both of us signed. And that was that.

"Now," says Mr. Toop, "what about Pawky?"

"What *about* Pawky?" says Catty.

"Where is he? Do you know him? Where have you hidden him?"

I waited, hoping Catty would turn out to be decent at the last minute, but he didn't. "Sure we know him," he says. "We've had him hidden for a long time, first one place and then another, and it's been a circus fooling these regular detective men you hired to chase us around."

"Where is he now?"

"Catty!" I says, but he paid no attention to me. He just got up and walked to the door and looked down the street, and then he came back and looked at Toop and says, "We hid him in the old lighthouse a spell, and when it got too hot there we decided we'd better have him

where we could look after him without dragging food all over the county, so—well, we decided to bring him here."

"Here?" says Mr. Toop.

"Here. Uh-huh. Right under everybody's nose."

I edged toward the door, and made all ready to slip out and jump on the wagon and drive Pawky off as fast as I could go, but Catty went and ruined that. I hated him for it.

"Better stay here," says he to me. "You can't get away with him." Then he turned to Toop and kind of grinned and says, "My partner and I sort of disagreed about telling you where Pawky is, and he figured on stealing him away and hiding him where I wouldn't know. But I guessed he was going to, and when he came ambling through town with a hogshead on his wagon, all fixed up with a lovely curtain, I knew what was up." He got up and walked to the door again and threw it open. Then he came back. "Well, Mr. Toop," says he, "Mr. Pawky's in our back room there, or else in the hogshead on Wee-wee's wagon."

Well, I couldn't believe it until it was actually done. It didn't seem possible Catty could do it. But he'd done it. He'd done the lowest down thing I ever heard of anybody doing. I

didn't know which way to turn, nor what to say or do.

"You sha'n't have him. You sha'n't take him," says I, and I ran to the door and stood against it. "You dassen't pass me. Don't you dare try it."

The big man grinned and came toward me, and just then a new voice speaks up and says, "What's all the excitement here?"

I looked, and there was a gentleman in the door—a real, regular gentleman, and you could tell it by the looks of him.

"Help me keep these men out of here," says I.

"What for?" says he, and then he turned to Mr. Toop and says, "Why, how are you Toop? Glad to see you. Heard you had a summer place up here."

"Winthrop!" says Mr. Toop. "What are you doing here?"

"Ran down on business," says Mr. Winthrop, "some business in connection with a patent. . . . By the way, Catty, where's the inventor? I'm anxious to meet him."

Catty grinned. "I calc'late," he says, "the inventor's scrooched up in a hogshead inventing something. He's always inventing. I'll call him in. . . . But wait a second, I want you to meet my partner, Mr. Winthrop. Wee-wee

Moore, this is Mr. Winthrop, the general attorney for the Universal Electrical Company, the biggest manufacturers of all kinds of electrical things in the world. You'll like Wee-wee, Mr. Winthrop. You can always depend on him. You sure can. He always does just what you expect of him."

"But ——" says Toop. "But—I—why did you come here?"

"Why," says Mr. Winthrop, "I represent the interests of an inventor named Pawky who has been staying hereabouts. He has an invention my company is much interested in, but I've been induced to represent Mr. Pawky personally. My young friend Atkins here induced me to do it. He seemed to think Mr. Pawky was in danger of not getting a square deal. Hardly seems likely, but that's what Catty thought."

"Catty!" says I, "how does Catty figure in it?"

"Why," says Mr. Winthrop, "he's been writing me letters and telling me all about what happened here. It seems the president knew me, or knew about me, and advised Catty to trust me if he had to trust anybody in the electrical business. So Catty and I have got pretty well acquainted. . . . And that's that. Now,

Mr. Toop, was it possible you wanted to see my client?"

Toop didn't say anything.

"Because I'm willing you should," says Mr. Winthrop. "If you can make him a fairer or more satisfactory offer for his invention than the Universal can, I shall advise him to accept it. But I doubt if you can. . . . No, I very much question if you can. . . . Eh? . . . You don't care to see him, then? No trouble at all, I assure you. We'll have him right in."

Mr. Toop snorted and made a noise in his chest, like he was going to blow up and bust, but he didn't. He just turned and rushed out of the room, and Mr. Winthrop looked after him sort of grave, and with his lip curled a little.

"If you always do busines on the level, fellows," he said, "you'll never have to make any exits like that. . . . And now, where's my client, and where are his diagrams and his models?"

"Fetch in Pawky," says Catty to me, "and while you're out just look in the big drawer under our pop-corn wagon. You'll find a box in there, and I guess you've seen the box before."

I was flabbergasted. Honest, I didn't know what to think, but I went out and told Pawky

to go in, and then I went to the pop-corn wagon, and there was Pawky's box, the one we had hid in the cave and that Catty had told the man the hiding place of. And then, all of a sudden, I understood. Catty hadn't told anything. All he had done was tell the place where the box used to be. He'd told because he knew the box wasn't there any more. And the reason he knew it wasn't there was because he must have sneaked out, unbeknownst to me, and hid it some place else.

Well, I felt like a ninny, and I didn't dare even to look at Catty when I went back in. But then, I says to myself, how was I to know, and if he wanted to make himself look like a traitor, how could he expect folks not to think he was one?

"Catty," says I, "you've played a low down trick on me—but, knowing you like I do I shouldn't ever have believed you could do such a thing. I ought to have known better."

"Don't worry," says he. "You acted just right, and I'm proud of you. You sure came through with flying colors, and even at the very end you'd have fought those men before you'd have let them through that door. . . . Wee-wee, you're as good a pal as they make and the kind of a fellow I want to tie to."

Well, that was about the end of that mix-up. Mr. Winthrop and Pawky and Catty and I got together, and they fixed up an agreement, and it was fair and aboveboard, so that Mr. Pawky would get what he ought to for his invention. And besides he got a laboratory, all fixed up with everything he needed, in the big factory of the Universal Electric Company, where he could go on inventing to his heart's content. . . . It was fine.

As for Catty and I, well, it took a little while for us to get all settled up and our business stowed away, but at last we struck a balance—that's what Catty said it was, and found out how much we'd turned our first fifty dollars into. It sounded pretty good, though it wasn't a million.

The schedule looked about like this:

Summer boarder grocery route.....	$167.53
Pop corn, peanuts, etc.....	96.09
Mowing lawns (profit).....	56.76
Sundries, including rowboat, hardware, showcase, dickers, etc., etc..	188.48
Stove wood, including 2000 cords sold to the wood and coal company, and a dollar a cord profit on Toop's 500 cords	4,137.67

We looked that over and shook hands, and Catty says, "Not so bad, not so bad. If we can make fifty dollars grow into more than four thousand, why, we ought to be able to take out four thousand next year, and make it grow into pretty close to half a million."

"Maybe," says I, "but I've had all the finance I want for a spell. I like variety."

"I like variety, too," says he, "but I like the kind that pays."

And that was like him all over. He liked a lot of things all right, but the thing he liked best was the one where he could scheme out some way of making money, or improving himself or somebody, and of getting ahead in the world. And the joke of it was, he usually managed to do it.

THE END

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